IN RELIEF OF DOUBT

R. E. WELSH, M.A.


Ye
Old Book
Shoppe
ABOVE BAR
SOUTHAMPTON
GILBERT & SON

To

Alec Hawkes

with very sincere wishes

from A.E.B.

Dec. 1910.

IN RELIEF OF DOUBT

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IN RELIEF OF DOUBT

BY · THE · REV.
R. E. WELSH, M.A.
AUTHOR OF
"GOD'S GENTLEMEN"
"THE PEOPLE AND THE PRIEST," ETC.

WITH INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY THE RT. REV. LORD BISHOP OF LONDON

LONDON
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1904

"*The Devil walks with us. He comes to us a real person, copper-coloured face, head a little on one side, forehead knit,* asking questions!"

OLIVE SCHREINER.

Dedicated

TO

T. A. W.

AND

O. T. W.



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PREFACE

TO NEW EDITION.

THE Right Rev. A. F. Winnington Ingram, D.D., Bishop of Stepney, when Head of Oxford House, found this little book useful in the hands of his workers in the East End; and in a lecture reported in the *Guardian* publicly recommended its circulation. He has kindly accepted the opportunity offered him of writing an Introductory Note, for which I thank his lordship.

A few alterations have been made in the present edition. Reviewers, who treated the first edition with favour, have shown reason for only slight changes.

The communications which have reached me —generally couched, it may be said, in grateful terms or asking for further help: some coming from students, others from men engaged in

business and the professions—have brought fresh evidence that there is a call for the direct and frank discussion of such current perplexities as those considered in this volume.

R. E. W

PREFACE

TO ORIGINAL EDITION.

The doubts that are current among busy men to-day are, I have some reason to know, usually of the practical sort discussed in the present volume. They arise from life's experiences, from observation of the world—the sinister things in churches, the good men who are sceptics, the moral tangle of human existence, the strange things in the Bible—from popular books that suggest a purely natural Jesus, and from travel in "heathen" lands. If to any reader my treatment of such questions appear too slight and condensed to be at all adequate, I must plead that those for whom the book is intended do not desire elaborate discussions. To their questions answers must be given that are direct and non-scholastic, as well as candid and fair. Neither in short chapters nor in long ones can doubt be totally dissolved and the ordeal ended; I offer only hints and ventures *in relief* of mental perplexity.

I address these discussions—which I might call "A Book of Common Doubt"—particularly to younger men in their early encounters with "the spectres of the mind."

The order in which the various questions are introduced requires explanation. After surveying some general aspects of belief and doubt, I begin in chapter five with what is central ground, the case of Christ and the *Memoirs*, passing in the eleventh and later sections to surrounding fields of inquiry, the Hebrew Writings, and some sore problems concerning Humanity.

"These things," says Edward Carpenter, "I translate for you; I wipe a mirror and place it in your hands."

R. E. W.

St. George's, Brondesbury, N.W.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

By the Right Rev.
THE BISHOP OF STEPNEY
(Lord Bishop of London).

I have great pleasure in writing a few lines as a preface to the second edition of this book.

I have found it in a great many instances of real service "in relief of doubt." On one occasion I sent it anonymously to a leading physician; and on meeting him a few weeks later, and asking him how he had liked it, I found he had given away nine copies to his friends. It completely cleared away the doubts of another young doctor, who had come to me in great distress; and out of three or four books which I recently lent a young man in business in the City, this was the one that helped him most.

All these instances and many more show that it has hit off exactly what is wanted, especially by the men of the day. It deals with that vague atmosphere of doubt which is so common, and dispels it by its clear and

pointed arguments; and it is written in so racy a style that none could put it down and call it dull.

I wish it therefore a long life, and am very glad that a second edition is being brought out. May it be even more useful than the first!

A. F. STEPNEY.

2, *Amen Court, St. Paul's, E.C.*
June 1898.

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"*Ah! sure within him and without,*
Could his dark wisdom find it out,
There must be answer to his doubt."—TENNYSON.

I

The Art of Doubting Well

The Ordeal: Perils and Gains—Newman—Temper of the Mind—Rebellion—Dilettante Doubt—The "Safe" Way—The Turn of the Scales—Proper Proofs—Haste *v.* Drift—The Personal Equation—"The Hunter"—Moral Factors—The Best Solvent.

THE phrase is Plato's. Philosophy, said the great Academician, is "the art of doubting well."

I may safely take for granted, on the part of my readers, a certain experience of those spectral doubts that haunt the modern mind. There has come, as the genial *Professor at the Breakfast Table* foresaw, "such a crack of old beliefs that the roar of it is heard in all the ministers' studies in Christendom." The majority of laymen, if not of ministers, who are

subjected to the ordeal of doubt, are of the silent sort. They shrink from laying bare their mind on such delicate and private matters.

"Of what religion are you, Mr. Rogers?" a lady once asked the patron of literature. (The incident is sometimes put to the credit of Disraeli.)

"What religion? I am of the religion of all sensible men."

"And what is that?" she asked.

"All sensible men, madam, keep that to themselves."

It is certain that the obstinate questionings which most sensible laymen keep to themselves are outside the ken of professional books that discuss materialism, agnosticism, and the customary evidences. The sorest doubts do not come from Germany or Oxford, from Spencer or Renan. The most ravenous of our sceptical thoughts spring upon us from the grim realities of human life, from "the work that goes on under the smoke-

counterpane" overhanging the great city, from the inexorable silence of the Eternal, from the millions of Orientals who have Sacred Books of their own, from the discovery of good sceptics and bad Christians, and from the offence of shocking creeds.

This ordeal of fire, the modern "Siege Perilous" of the mind, has happily its compensations. It is less perilous than the serene deadness and sluggish acquiescence which restrain the common mind from penetrating to the core of traditional beliefs. Why the human mind should not be placed beyond the possibility and perils of doubt upon questions of such living and lasting consequence is itself an enigma. One gain, however, is clear: that the spiritual powers of man are developed, his faculty for truth is sharpened, by his struggle to pierce the mists and discover the dawning outlines of reality. Were all things sure beyond doubt, forced on us beyond

the possibility of question, our minds would stagnate.*

Had not steam and electricity and other secrets of the earth lain in hiding awaiting human discovery, man's inventive faculty, besides his knowledge and skill, had been proportionately dwarfed. The quickening of mind that is gained by resolute search for truth among half-lights has even given rise to the paradox that the pursuit of truth is better than truth itself.

Newman was not wholly wrong. Protestantism does involve the chances of doubt and error. But so did the idyllic "Eden." The perils of doubt are the perils of the free. They are part of the strangely terrible endowment of each "sub-creative centre," and are essential to each intelli-

* Cf. Browning's study of a world, "Rephan," which is free from strain and doubt, but in consequence eternally stagnant, in contrast with that other globe, Earth, which is the scene of conflict and misgiving, but consequently the sphere of progress and hope.—(*Asolando.*)

gence made free for moral choice. So much the more pressing is the necessity of learning "the Art of Doubting well."

The Romanist, I venture the assertion, has just missed the truth in denying the right of private judgment. What is disastrous is an *untrained* private judgment. No doubt, simple minds often see their way direct to the essence of the truth, as Bryant's *Waterfowl* knew its solitary way through the illimitable air to its summer home. Yet since so many bewildering questions are raised around us, to doubt *well* becomes a necessary art, one of the finest of the fine arts.

The "Bird of Truth" is not to be brought to earth by every "Hunter" who starts out with Herbert Spencer or with Bagster's Bible in hand. In the search for truth, as in the painter's art, there are, we admit, strong and rough effects for the rude and untrained eye. Yet in both arts the loftiest beauty and truth are perceived only by the skilled and fit. One has to

acquire some art in the use of the touch-stones of truth and the instruments of truth-seeking, and to learn how to balance probabilities. One must be sensitive to light and shade, to delicate but significant aspects of a case, and must know how to give proportionate value to contending points, and perspective to the whole.

1. The condition of all conditions lies in the temper and spirit in which the truth-seeker proceeds in his search for truth.

On the one hand, intellectual rebellion-ism, the passion of fierce revolt, must necessarily impair one's clearness of spiritual perception. Intellectual despair, again, cynical disbelief in the possibility of finding truth at all, cannot fail to sap one's confident energy and alertness of mind. Especially if one has read widely among writers of many creeds and countries, or has travelled far and found honest men of opposite faiths each believing that *he* possesses the truth, one is tempted to take refuge in cold agnos-

ticism, and view all faith as blessed ignorance or happy illusion.

"'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." So saying, Lord Bacon makes Pilate's memorable question a mere brilliant play of sarcastic repartee. But no one was farther from "jesting" than Pilate. Stoic, Epicurean, Sceptic, Jew,—he had heard them all, and each was sure, but which was right? And here was another poor theorist with his airy dream-world! "Truth, indeed! Who, alas! can tell what is truth?" Modern minds are liable to become equally *blasé*. Truth is regarded as each man's dream; and wise men will not allow themselves to grow too serious, or "follow wandering fires."

It is Carlyle's "Centre of Indifference," the dangerous middle land "through which whoso travels from the negative pole to the positive must necessarily pass." In such a temper as this no man can doubt well. Even though the forms of faith

have vanished, one must have the *spirit* of faith, must have confidence that the constitution of all things is rational, and that, therefore, truth *is*, and is the reward of those that diligently seek it. Granted that credulity is the mother of fateful errors, and that apathy is the atmosphere of the deadly lotus-land. Yet there can be no rest in unbelieving negation, which is the air of a barren land. The true pilgrim of doubt is impelled by the wish to believe —not to make-believe, but to find and rest in the truth. A very different thing this is from an indolent desire to evade disturbing facts and escape from mental conflict.

It is a great matter to have confidence in the truth as the only *safe* thing. It is not safe to enjoy the false heaven of a comfortable faith of which we all the time conceal a lurking suspicion. To be true to all light from every quarter, to be ourselves true without paltering and policy, alone can lead to safety. No man need

fear any Gehenna who is utterly true. There is nothing to be feared except missing the truth and failing to live up to it. This confidence in the truth is the secret of courage in seeking it. On the other hand, intellectual courage may be so vaulting as to overleap its own aim. Brave men are tempted to prove to themselves their freedom and independence by an over-daring disbelief and wholesale denial.

When questions such as I propose to discuss have nothing more than a speculative interest, the pursuit of truth lacks one of its chief safeguards. If it is not felt that these problems affect life, if the intention be not practical and the issues at stake be not realised, then the animating spirit of the quest is not serious enough to guide the seeker safely. Doubt must not be an end in itself; the end must be life, action — "God's own appointed eyesalve for the blinding disease of speculative tendencies." Doubt, however needful as a stage in the mind's progress, is imperfec-

tion, weakness. Only belief can be a source of strength.

For the professional doubter, who nurses difficulties as if they were virtues, whose questions are born of vanity or egotism, and who wears his trouble as a mark of distinction, one can have no feeling but pity and scorn. Men require a very small stock-in-trade to set up as sceptics of this sort. A few atrocities culled from Judges or Chronicles, a few inconsistencies from the Churches, a few pungent sayings from Huxley, a few crumbs of science and philosophy—these will start them in the business. Indulging their dilletante doubt thus, they toy with the solemn questions which involve the hopes and moral destinies of men and nations, and determine the welfare of mankind. Those who doubt well do not boast of their obstinate questionings: they feel negation and perplexity to be pain and grief: through the night they are ever watching for the day-dawn.

2. One has to acquire the power of perceiving and resting confidently in truth while difficulties still remain. At first, the truth we seek must, we think, be set above all question. We have to learn, however, to be contented with a verdict for truth upon which the vote of the facts and opinions is not unanimous.

No moral truth can be proved without "buts" and "ifs" being left behind unconquered. Truth at the best is but a balance of probabilities: weightier reasons *pro* turning the scales against certain difficulties *contra*. We are content to have it so in ordinary life; we may expect it to be so in things ethical and spiritual, and we must not be shaken out of our convictions, or crippled in our action, by the bare existence of doubt.

"The sum of all is,—yes, my doubt is great,
My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough."

Even sceptics on their part are not secure against unsettling doubt regarding their doubts. They, too, if they continue

to think and keep an open mind, are "shaken by fits."

We are able to rest assured that the earth is round, though its rotundity is still disputed. Everything most certain has been denied. "You can buy treatises to show that Napoleon never lived, and that no battle of Bunker Hill was ever fought." We should believe nothing, if we could not hold it true in face of some doubt and denial.

The objections to any great truth are easily grasped by the superficial; while, as a rule, the positive reasons that support it need a keener insight and steadier judgment to appreciate them. Naturally Colonel Ingersoll, with his bluff humour and quick-witted repartee and ready eloquence, found it easy to demolish Moses, as he believed: much as certain preachers find it easy to ridicule Darwin out of court. But, after all, that sort of thing is only a clever exaggeration of superficial difficulties. And we must not

allow lingering difficulties to outweigh strong and solid reasons for belief.

3. One has to learn by what sort of proofs it is possible for moral and spiritual truth to satisfy the mind.

We must not demand the incongruous. The spiritual cannot be demonstrated with *mathematical* certainty; yet it has a certainty of its own, equally decisive after its own kind and in its own sphere. As well bring arithmetic to sum up the beauties of the Sistine Madonna as apply purely scientific tests to ethics and religion.

It is not meant that the mind should be overwhelmed by external evidence, nor that one's free judgment should be swept off its feet, rendered helpless, and caught away as the victim of brutal certainties. Belief, being compelled, would then no longer possess its moral value. Truth must be "born again" in the heart of each individual. Even goodness appears not to have been forced upon the "Adam"

of the race: room was left for the moral element of choice.

The greater and better part of our life is not regulated by what Aristotle calls τεκμήρια, "proofs positive," but by εἰκότα, "reasonable probabilities." In fact, "probability is the guide of life," and we have to learn to estimate truth by its means. The proofs of spiritual truth are delicate, cumulative, convergent. And, though so impalpable, though never amounting to mathematical demonstrations, they yet combine to forge the surest verities known to man. Says Tennyson's *Ancient Sage*:—

> "Nothing worthy proving can be proven,
> Nor yet disproven. Wherefore thou be wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to faith beyond the forms of faith."

4. The process cannot be hastened. Things must have time to settle down to their own true level and shape, time to test and prove or disprove themselves. Impatience spoils the formation of truth

within the mind. At a certain point, the vision of the truth may flash suddenly on the eye—as the law of gravitation broke in upon Newton's mind. But the process leading up to this point must be slow.

Many problems there are which one cannot settle by direct attack, yet which, if left alone, will be found, in the course of time and duty and experience, to have settled themselves. Many of the debates of hot youth fall by-and-by into insignificance. Broad principles emerge which overtop and supersede particular questions.

Said Robertson of Brighton, writing to a friend: "Begin from belief and love, and do not coerce belief. Your mind is at sea. Be patient, you cannot drift on the wide, wide sea for ever. Be sure you are in His hand, not hated but loved. Do not speak bitterly of Him, nor mistake Him. You must not 'make haste.'"

A danger lies here, however—the danger of *drift;* for the drift may be

determined all unconsciously by the subtle current of self-interest or local environment. Yet it is a danger that has to be risked. Time *must* be given for chaotic arguments and untested evidence to fall into form and perspective.

5. One must do one's best to eliminate the personal equation. To do so absolutely is an impossible task; for, as we are so largely the creatures of heredity and environment, our prejudices, that is, our pre-judgments, form no small part of the texture of our nature. Yet it is perhaps the very first condition of doubting well that we do our utmost to ascertain and eliminate the personal equation in the problems of the mind, that we correct our vision in so far as it may be distorted by one-sided experience, or by animosities against sceptics on the one hand or against the orthodox on the other.

Olive Schreiner, in her marvellous *Dreams*, describes the "Hunter" after

the Bird of Truth: "Then the Hunter took from his breast the shuttle of imagination and wound on it the threads of his Wishes, and all night long he sat and wove the net. And into it he threw a few grains of credulity [or incredulity, as the case may be], which his father had left him." "Many men have spread the net for Truth, but they have never found her. On the grains of credulity [or scepticism and negation] she will not feed; in the net of the Wishes her feet cannot be held." Yet none the less, the heart has its proper place in finding Truth. The dry intellect needs to be warmed and tinged by the heart's blood.

More difficult to displace are the moral aversions which we bring with us to the study of such questions. These are dangerous chiefly because we are slow to believe that we have any such moral aversions. We are affected, not only by vice and passion, but by refined forms of self-indulgence, by lazy preferences, by

love of intellectual appearances, and by secret habits. The Holy Grail was seen only by the pure — Sir Galahad, Sir Percivale, Sir Bors. It cannot be denied that there are men who doubt the Book that condemns them, making their doubts an excuse wherewith to cover their low-pitched lives. It is possible, if only a man be so disposed, to detach himself from himself, and discover how far his doubts are the brood of his habits and self-interest. This means that a higher self has been left in him uncorrupted and still true to light.

6. Probably there is no solvent for mental bewilderment of such value as an escape from much thinking to noble acting. The mind becomes benumbed, almost hypnotised, by the strain of mental concentration. The astronomer's eye loses its power to see the stars so clearly if he gazes too intently and too long. At such a stage in doubt, no more can be done till the fever of brain and eye has been cleared

away by life's active, kindly, humane duties. The best thing, perhaps the only thing a man can do then, is to leave the riddle of the mind and go forth to live the most healthy, helpful life possible to him, and especially to lend a hand in alleviating the lot of ill-starred fellow-mortals. It may be that *in life truth will emerge.**

One thing stands clear and scathless. Even when the truth about Christianity seems unattainable, *the spirit of the life of Jesus may be kept as the guide and motive of our own life.* Even if it seem impossible to be any longer sure of any revelation, of immortality, of God Himself, this at least remains unshaken—that the Christly life is the best worth living, that the man who enshrines that ideal in his heart and strives to realise somewhat of its sane, chaste, unselfish, loving spirit in his life, has won the highest blessedness attainable here and cannot miss the best

* See *Sartor Resartus,* chapter ix.; F. W. Robertson's *Life,* ii., 103; and Dr. John Ker's *Letters,* p 34.

that may lie beyond the veil. That, at least, is possible under all conditions of belief. That is the secret of Jesus, and the essence of religion. Whatever else be true or false, the spirit of that Life is the true one for us. Nothing can rob us of that. That anchor holds. That path is clear and leads to Light.

"*Sirs, the significance of this*
your doubt
Lies in the reason of it."
JEAN INGELOW.

II

The Making of Sceptics

The Natural History of Doubt—Is Doubt Sin?—Huxley and Bradlaugh—"Believe This or Nothing"—Renan—The Purifier of False Faith—Recoil from Misshapen Christianity—Specialists' Limitations—Darwin—Scientific "Bullies"—Tyndall—Sorrow-made Sceptics—Fashions in Doubt—What the Centuries say.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE COLERIDGE, "silver-tongued Coleridge," once confessed to Keble that his mind was sorely perplexed on the question of Inspiration. Imagine the shock when he was told that "most of the men who had difficulties on that subject were too wicked to be reasoned with."

1. Such a *wicked* retort may be taken as a short and easy way of making sceptics. To brand men's intelligent doubts as sins that incur perdition, must, if it do not frighten them out of all thinking, go far to force them into an attitude of defiance

and provide them with new reasons for doubt. Bradlaugh was driven from mere mental perplexity far towards stern disbelief by the snubbing meted out to him when he carried his questions to his clergyman. Men of conscious rectitude are embittered and alienated by the insinuation that they are doubters because they are not good men, as surely as high-spirited horses are made frantic by the harsh use of bit and whip.

Every error in faith involves, as we shall see at a later point, a proportionate loss for life's purposes. And if in any case such an error be the outbreak of enervating habits or moral laxity, it cannot fail to carry corresponding penalties with it. But to assume some moral evil as the necessary cause of a man's doubts, is little short of a crime. From this pestilent insinuation, and from the inference that honest disbelief in Church creeds involves the same retribution as robbery and murder, Professor Huxley de-

clares, "torrents of hypocrisy and cruelty have flowed along the course of the history of Christendom."

We have not heard that the mind was ever convinced of truth by the Inquisition and the rack. No more can men "perplexed in faith but pure in deeds" be led back to belief by moral charges, or by threats

> "And warnings of sorrow and dule
> To be dreed in that sulphurous place."

The Apostle Peter once sprang forward to defend his Master with the sword, but was bidden "Put up thy sword into its sheath"; the King of Truth must wield none but spiritual weapons—truth with love.

2. Doubt is in many instances the natural recoil of an independent mind from exorbitant demands upon belief: a rebound from a too-sure dogmatism.

Mr. Froude once assured his readers in *Good Words** that the Tractarian Move-

* The articles are included in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. iv.

ment, whilst headed by leaders of most devout spirit, made many sceptics among Oxford men, himself amongst the number. Mr. Lecky has been confirming this statement.* Newman and others virtually demanded "Believe this or—nothing!" In "this" they included such points as seemed to baffle their comprehension. Many courageous minds took them at their word. They strove to believe "this." But having failed, "Nothing be it, then," they exclaimed—and went away sorrowful.

Make too heavy demands upon faith: cry "All or nothing": insist that Religion itself stands or falls with your version of it; and you force brave spirits to dare consequences and to impale themselves on the horns of the dilemma which you have made so sharp for them.

Renan is candid in his *Souvenirs*, and confesses: "There were times when I was sorry that I was not a Protestant, so that I might be a philosopher without ceasing

* *Forum*, June, 1890.

to be a Christian. Then I recognised that the Catholics alone are consistent. A single error proves that the Church is not infallible: one weak part proves that the book is not a revealed one. Outside rigid orthodoxy there was nothing, so far as I could see, except Freethought after the manner of the French school of the eighteenth century." From this same cause does scepticism prevail in Roman Catholic countries. The Church asks too much of faith, and consequently from many of the best minds it gets nothing. It is a moral enormity to make Christianity answer with its very life for all our accepted creed, to drive doubters to the logical conclusions which we may conceive to be inevitable. Not thus did Christ treat men of imperfect faith. "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief," was enough to satisfy Him.

3. Scepticism often arises as nature's drastic cure for superstition and a dead orthodoxy.

History in many a chapter tells only too plainly how a period of unbelief dogs the heels of a priest-ridden, creed-bound epoch. With our own eyes to-day we can see that in France and Italy the superstitions and infallibilities of Romanism are generating their natural brood in anarchy and infidelity. Says the gentle Amiel, twin spirit of our own more Christian Smetham, referring to a certain French sceptical volume: "This curt and narrow school is the refuge of men of independent mind who have been scandalised by the colossal fraud of Ultramontanism."

When religion is known mainly under the form of confessionals and aves, images and blood-liquefactions, when Christianity means to

> "Hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
> And see God made and eaten all day long,
> And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
> Good, strong, thick, stupefying incense-smoke,"

it is no wonder if sane and valiant minds flee for liberty to Freethinking.

Just here Scepticism finds its proper office, and, unwittingly perhaps, performs a service to pure religion. It sifts superstition, pricks the bladder of make-believe, purges and cleanses current religion. In certain ages the sceptic has been most nearly the true believer, repudiating the palpably false in his quest of the true. But in the process, when rude hands are plucking away the parasites and accretions, one fears that the truth within will be dragged to earth. At such a crisis we must, with Carlyle, console ourselves by the confidence that "the fever of scepticism must burn itself out, and burn out thereby the impurities that caused it; then again will be cleanness, health."

After the same fashion a dead orthodoxy develops doubt in minds which are so constituted as to perforce think out things independently for themselves. They wake to discover themselves bound to a mummy creed, at one time alive with the soul of living faith, but now spiced and bandaged

for perpetual preservation. For them such a creed must be re-created. The function of doubt, in such a case, is to relieve them of that which is dead, and wake the mind to find a living faith of its own.

4. Most commonly, perhaps, it is a perverted or misshapen form of Christianity which provokes and justifies disbelief. Take the recent works of fiction which present instances of men who have become rebels from the faith. They are rebels from what? From some grim repulsive perversion of pure religion.

For instance, Olive Schreiner, in her powerful but painful *Story of an African Farm*, makes Bonaparte Blenkins the spokesman of Christianity, a man whose main theme is the lake of fire and the floating skeletons of the lost. From such a creed it is the Christian first who is the sceptic and rebel. George Eliot selects Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Dr. Cumming of prophetic fame, pouring scalding contempt on their selfish theology and "other-

worldliness." From deformed or misbegotten types of Christianity she calls her readers to revolt. Mrs. Humphry Ward has traced her departure from the orthodox fold to the studies of Spanish ecclesiastical history in which she was engaged on behalf of Dr. Wace's *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, and in the course of which her mind was shocked by the discovery of the superstitions and legends which had grown up in the Mediæval Church. It appears thus to have been a corruption that alienated her mind. The type from which some turn away in fierce unbelief is the Christianity which represents "saving one's own soul" as its be-all and end-all, and forgets Christ's great principle and example of living for others. It would be well if such revolting minds found refuge, as Russell Lowell's mind found refuge, in the Christianity whose charter is, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

These low types of religion do exist, though now they have to be sought mainly in the past; and in any Natural History of Doubt, they must be recognised as operating to create disbelief. It is a misfortune—yet it is also indirectly a reassurance to know—that what many sceptics disbelieve is Christianity according to Athanasius or the Mediæval Church, is some perversion of the story of the Four "Memoirs," but not the Christianity of Jesus Christ.

5. Scepticism may also spring from the habits and limitations of a specialist's pursuits.

Darwin is a case in point. He is one of the truest and most lovable of all Agnostics, always modest in his doubts, and at times doubting his doubts again. The very fact that such a man lost faith in Christianity shocks the innocent mind and shakes its assurance. What shall he do that cometh after the king?

But the causes of his disbelief lie on the surface in his autobiography. He never

had much of any religion, even in his youth. He was brought up by a Unitarian mother and a free-thinking father at a Unitarian school. He never seems to have experienced any *tang* of personal religion. Then science engrossed him, with what consequences he makes clear.

"Up to the age of thirty or beyond it, poetry such as Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, &c., gave me great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry. I have also lost my taste for pictures and music." "My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts." He avows that this has "caused the paralysis of that part of the brain on which the highest tastes depend."

He makes the frank and significant statement that he had lost the sense of beauty, art, and music, and also the sense of the spiritual and infinite, through life-long devotion to material facts. In consequence, his higher nature died of

atrophy; and so gradual, he tells us, was the loss of æsthetic taste and soul sense, that he had no struggle over its decline. We may honour the man, and yet detect herein the loss of the very capacity by which the heart appreciates the force and necessity of Christ and His work.

Scientists, accustomed from the nature of their work to subject everything to outward and palpable tests, are liable to have their mental perceptions and standards of reality materialised. Says our familiar friend, the sage of Boston: "Absolute peremptory facts are bullies, and those who keep company with them are apt to get a bullying habit of mind. There is no elasticity in a mathematical fact. What the mathematician knows, being absolute, unconditional, incapable of suffering question, it should tend, in the nature of things, to breed a despotic way of thinking."

Clerk Maxwell, Faraday, Brewster ought

not to be quoted in favour of Christianity as if they acquired any special weight of authority in the religious realm from their eminence in the sphere of the physical sciences. Chemical analysis and mathematical formulæ do nothing to sharpen the sense of spiritual truth. Any absorbing material occupation may tend, if uncorrected, to produce atrophy of spirit. There is a narrowness which is not born of too much theology.

Tyndall makes a candid avowal of this fact when he says: "Theologians have found comfort in the thought that Newton dealt with the question of Revelation, forgetful of the fact that the very devotion of his powers, through all the best years of his life, to a totally different class of ideas, not to speak of natural disqualifications, tended rather to render him less instead of more competent to deal with theological and historic questions." *

* *Fragments of Science*, II., 150.

The poet is more akin to the seer or prophet than is the scientist. Browning, Tennyson, Emerson, Shakespeare, Milton, are better qualified by their gifts and callings to judge of things spiritual. Biologists need have no more weight with us in religion than have our good and intelligent mothers.

6. It is experience of the misfortunes of life that drives others into the desert of disbelief. Silas Marner is estranged and turned into a loveless miser by "a faithless love, a false friend, and the loss of trust in all things, human and divine." In his *Robert Falconer* George Macdonald tells of a "sorrow-made infidel." *Job, Mark Rutherford,* and Richard Jefferies, are memorable cases of the same kind. Cruel suffering or devastating bereavement has raised in some breasts not only doubt, but wrath—wrath which feeds on the sense of relentless wrong.

This is a loss of faith with which no

argument can cope, which nought but love, human and Christian, can alleviate. Only love's warmth can melt the frozen heart. A later chapter will advance some considerations that may help to soften the sense of life's wrong.

7. Then withal, Heresy and Doubt have their fashions and fops. The Zeit-Geist, or Spirit of the Age, has to be taken into consideration in accounting for Scepticism. One observes how commonly professed belief in Christianity is a matter of mere social fashion and traditional convention, not hypocritical, but imitative and superficial. Equally may men's minds be caught by an epidemic of doubt, falling victims to a social vogue of disbelief. At different times men have been seized by the madness of the Crusades, by the craze for monastic and ascetic life, and again by a vandal spirit of reform. Is there not a social infection of scepticism, a craze for questioning, abroad to-day?

"Had I been born three hundred years ago,
They'd say, 'What's strange? Blougram of course believes.'
And, seventy years since, 'disbelieves *of course*.'
But now, 'He may believe: and yet—and yet—
How can he?'"

In estimating the significance of present-day unbelief, we have to recall the fact that the same infection visited Britain during the latter part of the seventeenth, and again of the eighteenth century. May it not be a recurrent epidemic? A century ago Voltaire, Rousseau, and the French Encyclopædists killed the Christian religion. Voltaire pronounced it dead. But the room where he penned its obituary afterwards became a Bible Depôt. How many lives this faith of Jesus has shown that it possesses! Its power of Resurrection, its power to outlive perversions and criticism, is surely a sign that in it lies the Truth eternal. Just when our modern prophets are declaring that the old faith is losing its hold, it is commanding more of the general intelligence of the world,

and displaying more activity all round our globe, than it has done in any century of the past.

"The lesson of life," says Emerson, "is to believe what the years and the centuries say against the hours."

"Opinions shape ideals, and it is ideals that inspire conduct."
MR. JOHN MORLEY'S
"Compromise."

III

Does it Matter What a Man Believes?

Library Views *v.* Personal Convictions—Maps and Travel—"If a Man be *Sincere*"—Mormon and Pessimist—"If a Man *does* Right?"—Beliefs that Tell—Krooman Skipper—Verdict of History and Character—Family and National Tests.

THERE are good men of all beliefs and of no belief; good Romanists like Manning, and good Agnostics such as Darwin, good Calvinists like Chalmers, and good Unitarians such as Channing. Are we not, then, driven to the conclusion that it matters little what a man's beliefs are, if only he be sincere?

This at least appears to be indisputable, that there is an element uniting human spirits which is much more subtle and radical than the intellectual creeds which they profess. The essence of a man's

spirit does not always distil itself fully into stated beliefs.

1. But does the questioner mean by a man's beliefs his sets of opinions, or his spiritual perceptions of truth? Many respectable people have sets of opinions, much as they have sets of standard works shelved within glass-fronted book-cases that are seldom opened. For their conventional library purposes it matters little whether they possess Freeman or Froude, Miss Strickland or Macaulay. After the same fashion one set of religious views might do as well as another. If our beliefs are conventional or procured wholesale, it certainly does not matter so very much what we believe.

But suppose that I have a small and choice selection of volumes on my shelves: that I have purchased them with my hard-earned money at the cost of protracted labour: and that they bear the imprint of close study. Suppose that I have set them there because I have found them true to

my own thoughts and answering to my own experiences, and that I prize them for what they are to me. Then it does matter, and matter enormously, of what sort they are. Zola will not do as well as Browning, nor Schopenhauer as well as Ruskin. The character of my favourites will be both an index to the inherent tastes and qualities by which I was drawn to them, and a measure of the influences which have been shaping my mind and heart for better or for worse.

If I believe, not as I believe in Stanley's map of Central Africa, knowing nothing to the contrary, but as I believe in the map of Japan, because I have traversed its highways and seen the cone of Fuji-san from many of its bays and seaboards; if I believe in spiritual realities because I have burnt my brain hot and worn my heart weary in striving to perceive them and test them in my own life; if they are *convictions* and not mere sets of "views" or library opinions, then they cannot fail

to tell upon me in every fibre of my character and line of my life. In such a case it does matter not a little what a man believes.

Savonarola said that "a man only believes that which he practises." I doubt it. For there are men morally not unlike the recent hero of a London spectacle, whose face looked one way while his feet pointed the other way! Yet it is true that in the strictest sense of believing we really believe very little—only what we have penetrated with our own spirit's sight and taken into our own life. Perhaps the altar of our traditional faith has been rudely thrown to earth by ruthless hands, and we have been able only through protracted struggles to erect a smaller, simpler one; but better far the simpler faith, because it is our own. It is more certain to sway our wills and electrify our energies than whole catechisms accepted without a qualm. It is in this sense that "there lives more faith in honest

doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds."

"But if a man be sincere—" Then his sincerity is the hammer that drives his belief home, and the stronger the sincerity the deeper will the practical point of the belief penetrate into his life and conduct. If he is sincere only in the sense that he good-naturedly means well, and neither wilfully warps his judgment nor perverts his spiritual sense, yet lives in bovine freedom from intelligent and personal inquiry, the effect of this easy sincerity may be inappreciable. But if his sincerity contains the concentrated energy of his will and conscience and heart, it is the very engine which gives living effect to his beliefs, for good or ill according as the moral quality of them is preponderatingly good or ill.

A man may be a sincere polygamist—as a Mormon or a Mohammedan—but his sincerity will not prevent the practice of polygamy from ending in an unhappy harvest of results. Sincerity in the

Romanist may make him a persecutor in very virtue of the intensity of his beliefs. Sincerity in the Pessimist may induce him to end the thousand heart-aches with a bare bodkin. Sincerity is part of the very force by which beliefs of different moral quality produce their proper effects. It matters more what a man believes if he is sincere than if he is insincere. The Supreme Judge, in disentangling the myriad threads of man's composite character, will, we are sure, give full value to sincerity of mind. Yet our eyes tell us that sincerity cannot cancel the native productiveness of truth or of error.

There are men who are better than their creed, as there are others who are worse than their creed. But why? Perhaps because they have never really incorporated their creed in their blood so as to become the spirit of their life, and have kept it confined to their "thought-box." Perhaps because they possess, as the gift of heredity, either a finely-tempered con-

stitution or, on the contrary, some taints of blood, and nature's endowment has not yet been overbalanced by their faith. Perhaps their environment, either the moral atmosphere of Christian surroundings, or the polluted air of unhappy conditions, has charged their life with elements which do not belong to their creed. My next discussion points to one of the factors that must be considered in answering this question.

"But if a man *does right*, how can it matter what his beliefs are?" That, however, begs the very question in dispute. The question is, after setting aside the factors introduced by heredity and environment, whether true heart-tinctured thinking is not in some considerable measure the spring of right acting. Matthew Arnold reiterates the statement that conduct is three-fourths of life. But then the other fourth, the inward factor, goes far towards shaping the three-fourths.

It is just the old debate of St. James in

modern guise. Faith without works is dead: agreed. Shall we say in consequence—what is the use of faith if only we have the works? No; for our outer active life is the expression of the formative convictions and affections within, and faith as a moral reality is the generator of life.

The truth appears to be this, that a man's belief helps to mould his conduct, and equally in turn his conduct acts reflexly upon his mind and helps to mould his belief. If his life be loose, his faith will seek to conform to the laxity of his habits. The two, if free and true, act and re-act on each other, and tend to slide up and down in company. Belief *is* significant, being partly a moral product, the secretion of character, of inclination, and of past habit. It is like the shell which the mollusc secretes and gathers round itself—partly the product of the formative life within, and partly the form which thereafter determines its future activities.

2. The present question cannot be answered without inquiring what relation the thing believed bears to the man's life. If it be that Mars is tenanted, or that Homer is a myth, or that Shakespeare is really Bacon, the consequences for life and conduct will be *nil*. We are neither the better nor the worse for believing or denying that Moses wrote Deuteronomy, or that the Song of Songs is purely a poem of incorruptible love. Such matters are too remote from conscience and action to affect us perceptibly.

But if we realistically believe in a Father-God, an enveloping Over-Heart, as good and quick-sighted as Christ was, such a belief, if the product of our spiritual perceptions, must sharpen conscience and intensify responsibility, must elevate life's hopes and endeavours into loftier significance, and set all conduct in a moral light, and hold out the promise that

> "Something in this world amiss,
> Shall be unriddled by-and-by."

It is not of so much consequence what the scholastic and ecclesiastical construction of a man's creed is as whether his belief has a moral fibre and the sense of a living Power in it.

The high-priest of Positivism, Mr. Harrison, has been saying lately, that "conduct is the result of the Ideal that we revere *plus* the truth which we know to be supreme." Tested by this canon, what must be the effect of belief in Jesus as the Ideal of God and man, as the living personification of truth and goodness, as the Redeemer and Comforter of the tempted and distraught? Creeds set in printer's type are no measure of its value. It is tested and proved in a myriad cases that this faith of Christ, when sincere, fires the life with the energy of a great hope, expands and enriches the heart, gives suffering and sorrow a divine setting, and upon the dark problems of human existence and destiny casts light from God's "awful rose of Dawn." If one

may indulge the "second-sight" of imagination a little, what a history that will be when all the golden deeds done and lives ennobled by the faith and spirit of Christ are gathered from all quarters—the true nimbus round His head!

But would not belief in Goodness, Truth, Eternal Righteousness, and Love serve as well for making character? No, my masters! Dead abstractions are as cold as "tables of stone." They have not eyes to scrutinise us, nor a heart to feel for us. They lack the fascinating spell of a sublime Personality. Matthew Arnold put it without any qualifications: "A correct scientific statement of rules of virtue has upon the great majority of mankind simply no effect at all." So—

> "Wisdom dealt with mortal powers
> Where truth in closest words shall fail,
> When truth embodied in a tale
> Shall enter in at lowly doors."

Would sincere Agnosticism do as well as the Father-God and Christ's moral re-

demption and the force of prayer? The Unknown Blank which to the Agnostic is all that is left in the place of God cannot infect the will with moral energy and brace the heart with hope. A big ?, a great x or Unknown Quantity, cannot turn mill-wheels, and as little can it turn men's wandering steps or strengthen men's pliant character.

Scepticism is a negative, and is therefore impotent. It never, with Howard, reformed prison life till it was taught the spirit of Social Reform by Christ. It has not, with Florence Nightingale, tended the wounded on the battle-field. It has not, with Robert Raikes and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, cared for the young and the waifs. It has not, with Livingstone, gone to heal the open sores of poor Africa. Professor Huxley opened his fusillade upon General Booth's scheme of rescue for the "submerged tenth"; but, without pronouncing

judgment on that scheme, I venture to ask what great proposal has the critic ever planned or tried for the reclamation of the waste classes? Science has its own sublime mission and heroes, and religion owes to it some of the sharp tornadoes that have cleansed the ecclesiastical swamp. But chemicals and formulæ are impotent to fashion hearts and transfigure lives, and scepticism can do as little in that direction as they.

George Eliot poked fun at the poet Young and his style of argument: "If it were not for the prospect of immortality, he considers it would be wise to be indecent or to murder one's father." Of course, religion does not *create* the moral fibre nor manufacture the Divine threads in the web of our being. But George Eliot elsewhere admits that "the idea of God, and the sense of His presence, intensify all noble feeling, and encourage all noble effort . . . pour new life into our too languid love, and give firm-

ness to our vacillating purpose." Without an Eternal Depository of our resolves and aspirations, without a Conscious Over-Heart to share our life, and endow it with significance and worth, our existence would be dwarfed and denuded and materialised. We should lose the fascination of the face of a Father, and walk under what Mr. R. H. Hutton calls a "polished arch or dome reflecting the edifice beneath."

The over-arching spiritual powers are not useless for life's guidance. One might quote "the skipper on the African shores, say a Krooman, who calls a foreign-going vessel a star-gazer. 'I,' says the Krooman, 'go from headland to headland; I steer by what I know; I keep to terrestrial ground. But *he*, why he fancies that, out of sight of land, people can find out what spot they are on by looking at another world through a glass. We are not simple enough to believe that it is from another world we

are going to learn whether it is here we are or there!'"

Christian faith possesses all the terrestrial lights and landmarks which can be claimed by the secularist, the personal and the social conscience, and the teaching of human experience. But, in addition, it is endowed with the stars of Revealed Truth, and there are many days and nights when by these upper lights alone can a man discover where he is and how to steer. "Hitch your wagon to a star!"

3. We may test the effects which belief, over-belief, and scepticism, severally exercise upon individual and national *character*, and in this final court of appeal may judge whether belief is of any consequence for life.

Ask the verdict of History, man's ultimate human arbiter. Ages of scepticism have been ages of moral degeneracy. As Rome became sceptical she became feeble and demoralised. Which was cause and which effect may be a debatable

question: probably each was cause and each effect in turn. But alike in the annals of Rome, of France, and of other peoples, the fact is written in livid letters, that national and social degeneration is found in company with unbelief.

Mr. Cotter Morison retorts that "Ages of Faith" have been ages of social stagnation, fanaticism, and crime. But by "Ages of Faith" he really means ages of credulity, of priestcraft and churchcraft and superstition. He selects a period when the Church had buried Christ's simple Christianity under the baptized paganism of Mariolatry and the Mass. What shall we say of the fairness and intelligence of bearded men who excite prejudice against the faith of Jesus by affixing the title "Ages of Faith" to the centuries when Christ's own teaching was entombed in priestly accretions and corruptions?

Observe, too, the drift of scepticism in the "narrows" of domestic questions.

The surest touchstone for testing the worth of many social theories is the family tie, the marriage question—the rock on which many a pretentious ship has split. No need to go back to the Shelley and Godwin and Byron circles. To take these eccentric characters as representative specimens would not fulfil the canon to be laid down in the chapter that follows.

But scan current Monthlies and the novels that deal with the sex questions, and on every hand there are proofs that the proposals for loosening domestic ties, for even relaxing the most sacred bond of all, spring from the camp which has abandoned the faith of Christ. One might also quote Goethe and his *liaisons*, and even George Eliot and her breach of that social law on which Christ pronounced so clear a verdict. And she a woman, too, when woman would be the first and most terrible sufferer from the loosened family bond!

"Divinities have ended for us," says Mr. Frederic Harrison. Well done, assertion! But suppose it true. In some strong souls Christian virtues would survive. But if such giants as Goethe and George Eliot, and some of the eminent of to-day are so relaxed by their loss of faith, what could be expected of the great masses of mankind? If such is done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry? With nothing except a huge Unknown above, and with such examples of the morals of genius on earth, would not common men snatch at a social code so convenient for the demands of their lower nature?

In social conditions as well as in individual character, clearly it does matter what men believe.

"A man who knows human nature in its shirt-sleeves, who makes bargains with deacons instead of talking over texts with them, gets some things into his head he might not find in the index to his 'Body of Divinity.'"—O. W. HOLMES.

IV

Good Sceptics and Bad Christians

The "Aftershine of Christianity"—Natural Virtues—Christian Blood in Sceptics' Veins—Russell Lowell—The Test of Generations—Glad to Disbelieve—Pious Humbugs—Bulstrode, Chadband, etc.—The Worst the Abuse of the Best—Froude.

"I HAVE looked on the face of a saintly woman this very day," says our genial friend the *Professor at the Breakfast Table*, "whose creed many dread and hate, but whose life is lovely and noble." We, too, have looked on the face of good and noble-hearted sceptics; and we have gone away feeling that they had raised a new problem for faith.

We have read Darwin's *Life*, or have been confronted with "Luke Raeburn"

in Edna Lyall's *We Two*, and we have found ourselves face to face with the stubborn question, how to account for a character of singular sincerity and goodness sustained without a belief in Christianity. If sceptics are to be found who are such upright and unselfish men, why should we any longer regard the Christian religion as vital for human character and well-being? Specially severe is the shock of this discovery when it comes to a man who has had unfortunate experience of shifty deacons, mean-hearted, self-centred Christians.

1. Now, in order to open up the subject, we must ask, Was it his scepticism that gave birth to the good sceptic's code of honour and Christly spirit? If we trace to their prime source his conceptions of noble character, if we draw up the genealogy of his moral principles and personal virtues, shall we find that these sprang from his sceptical creed?

He is a good husband, let us say. But,

if so, where did his reverence for the marriage tie originate? Whence his sense of the sacredness of wedlock and of the purity of home? We have seen already what effect scepticism seems to have upon the domestic question. But in the case of the men we have now in our minds, whence came their respect for womanhood, monogamy, and childhood? If they have large hearts and fellow-feeling for all suffering strugglers, whence their sympathy with human woe? The *vis a tergo*, the force at the back of all—whence came that? Who "funded" their virtues?

Of his blackest period of doubt, Carlyle could say, in his *Sartor*, "From suicide a certain aftershine (Nachschein) of Christianity withheld me." In the sterling lives of good sceptics we often see this "aftershine of Christianity." The very qualities which set them in favourable contrast with many nominal Christians run back their roots, not to unbelief, but

to the ethics and the diffused spirit of Christ.

Not that all human goodness flows down to us within the banks of Christianity. It is a poor compliment to God to discredit the natural goodness of mankind, so as thereby to add to the credit and reputation of Jesus Christ. Why should any one, in jealousy for the divineness of Christianity, wish to deny moral illumination and religious feeling to the natural spirit of the human race? That is to rob nine-tenths of humanity and history of their divine elements, to degrade God's work as a whole in the interests of one section of it. The Bible, the Christ of the Bible, has no such narrow conception of the Father. There is, it says, a "light that lighteth every man," the same light that came into the world in Jesus. Says Amiel, the Swiss seer, in his *Journal Intime*, "Such has been the brilliancy and radiance both of Revealer and Revelation, that the astonished world has for-

gotten its justice in its admiration, and has referred to one single benefactor the whole of those benefits which are its heritage from the past."

With Mr. Moncure Conway "we rejoice in the varied fruits of the Good Mind, though the trees be not labelled from our botany," nor (we may add) planted and trained by our own "Gardener." It would be a mistaken service to Christianity to ascribe all the virtues in the sceptic's or our own character to the influence of the historic Christ. Yet, as a mere matter of fact, Christianity has passed into all the streams of English life, into the conscience and intelligence and social code of the Anglo-Saxon race. A Christian heritage falls to every one of us, no matter what our creed may be.

A glance along history—we have the authority of Lecky and Hallam for the claim—will certify that Christ and men like Thomas à Kempis and Sir Thomas

More and Luther and George Fox have laboured, and Darwin and Mrs. Besant, and all other sceptics, as well as all Christians, have entered into their labours. The founder of Positivism studied and prized no book more than the *Imitatio Christi* (also George Eliot's chief companion) ; and his altruism is only a poorer name for Christian love.

If the world owes anything at all to Jesus, it surely owes to Him its ennobling ideal of the service of others, taught and illustrated alike by His life and death. Yet this is the foremost and favourite principle among Positivists and Ethical Societies, which sometimes proclaim it as if they had invented or discovered it! In truth, the entire Humanitarianism of the day, the chief plank in the platform of sceptical reformers, is *mainly* and ultimately the work of the Great Humanitarian and His penetrative spirit. Even the favourite terms "humanity," "brotherhood," "regeneration of society," in such

constant use among the forward school, are expressions of Christian origin. Says pawky Andrew Fuller: "After grazing in the pastures of revelation, they boast of having grown fat by nature."

Prof. Huxley had a Christian parentage. He is still nourished by what Renan calls the moral sap of the old faith—*la sève morale de la vieille croyance*. George Eliot was bred an evangelical. Most of the better sceptics have the blood of a Christian ancestry in their veins. "The American baby sucks in freedom with the milk of the breast at which he hangs." We may substitute "Christianity" for "freedom" in that sentence and leave it equally true. Christian heredity, a Christian environment, a Christian ethical atmosphere, the harvest of past Christian conflicts and teachings—to these we all, whatever our beliefs, are indebted for the best that is in us. Our whole English thought and life, our common ideals, are largely saturated with Christianity. It is like Anglo-Saxon

in our language, which we employ as part of our birthright.

"Society is a strong solution of books," says the Autocrat; and, equally, a strong solution of Christian ethics. With the Bible taught to successive generations, no wonder if its elements are, more or less fully, in our blood, in the fabric of our mind and life, a second nature. In the strength of the Christian bread eaten by our fathers and our race, we are able to go fasting in the wilderness forty days and forty nights, and still display some of the old virtues and energies.

One is reminded of the spies who brought back a bad report of the land of Canaan, while all the time they bore on their shoulders burdens of rich grapes plucked from its vines, belying their report. Good sceptics bear in their lives and homes the fruits of that Christian soil which they depreciate. Their personal and domestic virtues, when rightly viewed, are a tribute and testimony in no small

measure to Christianity, which still girds them though they may not know it.

> "You criticise the soil? It reared this tree—
> This broad life and whatever fruit it bears."

Russell Lowell was a man with no prejudice in favour of churches and theology. His literary culture and his acquaintance with life were sufficiently wide to liberalise his sympathies. His recent *Letters*, so sane, so radiant with genial lights and frank avowals, so richly stored, are in themselves an education. Perhaps his words may carry weight in quarters where ours would be discounted: they are worth quoting:—

"I fear that when we indulge ourselves in the amusement of going without a religion, we are not, perhaps, aware how much we are sustained by an enormous mass of religious feeling and religious conviction, so that, whatever it may be safe for us to think, for us who have had great advantages, and have been brought

up in such a way that a certain moral direction has been given to our character, I do not know what would become of the less favoured classes of mankind, if they undertook to play the same game."

Any Christian system of religion, in spite of defects, is "infinitely preferable to any form of polite and polished scepticism, which gathers as its votaries the degenerate sons of heroic ancestors, who, having been trained in a society and educated in schools, the foundations of which were laid by men of faith and piety, now turn and kick down the ladder by which they have climbed up, and persuade men to live without God and leave them to die without hope. These men, indulging themselves in the amusement of going without a religion, may be thankful that they live in lands where the Gospel they neglect has tamed the beastliness and ferocity of the men who, but for Christianity, might long ago have eaten their carcases like the South Sea

Islanders, or cut off their heads and tanned their hides like the monsters of the French Revolution."

When the keen scrutiny of sceptics "has found a place on this planet, ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted, a place where age is reverenced, infancy respected, womanhood honoured, and human life held in due regard,—when sceptics can find such a place, ten miles square, on this globe, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations, and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the sceptical *literati* to move thither, and then ventilate their views. But so long as these men are very dependent on the religion which they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate a little before they seek to rob a Christian of his hope and humanity of its faith in that

Saviour who alone has given to men that hope of eternal life which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom."

2. Then, too, neither scepticism nor religion can be fully tried and tested on the scale of the individual or even of a single generation. Society and the nation must adopt and practise it for a length of time sufficient to reveal its ultimate issues. Imagine an English friend now deep in Africa writing home: "You affirm that the inhabitants of Central Africa are dark-skinned. I have lived here for years and am not black!" Marry, no! but even you are tanned! Is it much more rational for a man to say, "I live without Christ and without prayer, and yet I think I am not less moral than average Christians." Perhaps so—though one would need to see to your spirit's core to determine what is happening under the crust of moral habit. But bring up your

children on that principle. Let society at large, also, dispense with the spiritual supports of Christianity. Then, after a couple of generations have assimilated the scepticism and have done a little to get quit of inborn Christian blood—then, and not perfectly even then, can we see the proper and indigenous harvest of a life entirely denuded of Christianity.

Even a couple of generations do not eradicate latent virtues. For, as the missionaries in Samoa told Baron von Hübner, it takes several generations for Christian morality to get into the blood. Conversely we might say with Miss Frances Power Cobbe: "It would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christianity."

Men of exceptional powers of mind and force of character are scarcely a fair test of unbelief: for "genius has ever meat to eat that the world knows not of." The very energy of their powers, by which

they have braved current opinion and thought their way through the thicket to a clear ground of their own, is probably one large factor that makes their moral character appear to be proof against the supposed effects of unbelief.

Professor Clifford and Darwin and "Luke Raeburn" are not the most decisive measure of the harvest of scepticism—any more than Savonarola and John Knox are of Christianity. Give unbelief to the masses of the people and set it in the homes and workshops of England. Then we shall see whether it does not tend to relax moral bonds, enfeeble social virtues, and give excuse for the gratification of selfish desire.

Not all sceptics are bad men; but *bad men are glad to become sceptics*, and so get rid of unwelcome moral restraints—a flash from actual life that betrays the moral power of religion. Observation, also, has shown us that not a few sceptics are either "cranks," or cynics, or social revolu-

tionists wild with general rebellion against all order. A medical man, who had for a time relinquished all faith—a sorrow-made sceptic—has, while these words were being written, said to the writer: "If you ever meet with cases like mine, advise them to go to hear sceptics lecture. I went: and it was they who drove me back to Christianity."

* * * *

3. Is not this, however, the very weapon with which Christianity can be best assailed? *What of the bad specimens of Christians?*

"Look here," said a young man to Professor Drummond, "you see that elderly gentleman? He is the founder of our infidel club." "But he is a leading elder of the Church!" "I know he is; but he founded our infidel club. Every man in the village knows what a humbug he is, and so we will have nothing to do with religion."

Bad logic it may be, or good. But even

the one-eyed observer can see that there are thousands of worthy citizens who never darken a church door solely because they have found many Church people to be mean-spirited, narrow-hearted, close-fisted, and self-seeking. The Heart-searcher alone knows how hard it is to retain belief in a religion so much on the lips of humbugs.

Happily, on the other hand, the richest, noblest natures, the most deeply-principled and trusty men we have ever met have been unostentatious, earnest Christians; and they help to save our faith. Carlyle avows: "As to the people I see, the best class of all are the religious people. . . It teaches me again that the best of this class is the best that one will find in any class whatsoever."*

After all, however, is Christ discredited by the offensive samples of religious people? Is the half-sanctimonious Bulstrode of *Middlemarch*, is the unctuous

* Froude's *Carlyle's Life in London*, I., 133.

Chadband of Dickens, an argument against Christianity? Are they not an indirect plea for the *genuine* article in religion? Obviously it is not in virtue of their being Christians that they are objectionable: it is because they are *bad* specimens, because they misrepresent Christ's Christianity.

How can Christ prevent the mean and selfish from calling themselves by His name? Malthus cannot justly be saddled with all the loose code gathered round the name of Malthusianism. Senator Nicodemus need not draw off from Christ because one in twelve among His intimates is a greedy traitor, and another in twelve is impulsive and terrified into falsehood.

The mental exile from the churches may, because of what "the dirty nurse Experience" has taught him, be no longer able to believe in clergy and deacons. But *they* are not Christ. They may have wandered far from His simple and lofty faith and life: He Himself yet remains to be interpreted, answered, and followed.

He is entitled to claim that He shall be estimated on His own merits. Disbelieving in much else, one may still keep one's faith in Him, and recognise His power over those in whose heart He is deeply set. I cannot think it fair, however natural it may be, to dismiss His claim upon our love and imitation because of Englishmen, eighteen hundred years after He is gone, who misrepresent Him. As well justify one's intemperance on the ground that some blue-ribbon people drink on the sly! The bad Christians are bad for *want* of Christianity.

The wars and persecutions, Inquisition racks and Smithfield fires, that darken the history of Christendom, are set forward by Mrs. Besant, "Ouida," the late Mr. Cotter Morison and others as overwhelming testimony against Christianity. But "Christian is as Christian does"; and it surely betrays a total lack of discriminating power when these deeds of criminal hate or distorted devotion are confounded

with the primitive religion of Jesus. Every reader of the Four Gospels well knows that these deeds of the nominal Church are palpably opposed to the Christianity of Christ.

Every good thing is followed by its counterfeits—medicine by quackery, freedom by anarchy—and the very best things have proved to be liable to counterfeits and abuse. The excesses of the French Revolution do not brand liberty as immoral because they were perpetrated under the guise of love of liberty. "Oh Liberty!" cried Madame Roland,—"Oh Christ!" may Christians cry in sorrow, "what crimes have been committed in thy name!" Surely it is adding wrong to wrong when these enormities are seized as weapons with which to smite Christ on the face. Yet the very protest which these indignant critics raise against the enormities of Christian history is a resurrection of the moral ideal which sprang mainly from the teaching of Christ, and

thus indirectly and unwittingly a tribute to unadulterated Christianity. These corruptions, both in individuals and in nations, are recognised by candid minds to be false and not true specimens of the fruits of Christ's life.

"Christianity," says Froude in his *Short Studies*, "has abler advocates than its professed defenders, in those quiet and humble men and women who in the light of it and the strength of it live holy, beautiful and self-denying lives. The God that answers by fire is the God whom mankind will acknowledge; and so long as the fruits of the Spirit continue to be visible in charity, in self-sacrifice, in those graces which raise human creatures above themselves, thoughtful persons will remain convinced that with them in some form or other is the secret of truth."

"All that is fair and beautiful in Christian morality had been taught in the world ages before Christ was born."—MRS. BESANT.

V

Was Jesus Original?

Parallels to Christ's Ethics—Parliament of Religions—Sacred Books of the East—Sifted Heaps—The Prehistoric Christ—Truth personified—The Catholic Christ—Christ's Specialty—The Cross in God.

THE question, whether Jesus was original, may strike the devout as sacrilegious. But it is the question which is put, and put reverently, by an increasing number of studious minds. To-day for a shilling one may buy *Marcus Aurelius*, *Seneca*, or *Epictetus*, or, for a trifle more, volumes containing the best things in the Talmud, or in Buddhist, Persian, or Hindu Sacred Writings. It is a memorable and critical hour when the adventurous novice makes his first acquaintance with such books. Perhaps in Farrar's *Seekers after God*, or Brace's *Unknown God*, possibly even in

Keningale Cook's more ponderous volume, he discovers the striking resemblance that exists between the ethical teaching of Jesus and that of other Masters. Here are a few specimens.

Persian: "Do as you would be done by." "Immodest looks are sins. To think evil is to sin." "In always doing of good works be diligent, that it may come to thy assistance in the heavens."

Buddhist: "Overcome anger by love, falsehood by truth, good by evil."

Chinese: "The good man loves all men. All within the four seas are his brothers. Love of man is chief of all the virtues."

Talmud: "Whosoever is quick in forgiving, his sins also shall be forgiven." "With the measure with which a man measures, men will measure to him." "Its trouble sufficeth for each hour."

The Talmud loudly denounces the "plague of Pharisaism," "lip-serving," and "making the law a burden to men." Even several of the parables in the Gospels

have their equivalents in the Sacred Books of Egypt and in the Talmud. From the latter source comes the following:—

"A sage walking in the market-place, crowded with people, suddenly meets Elijah, and asks him who out of that vast multitude would be saved. The prophet first points to a weird-looking turnkey—'Because he is merciful to his prisoners.' Next he points to two common-looking tradesmen, who are pleasantly chatting as they thread their way through the crowd. The sage runs up to them and asks what special good works they have done to save them. Puzzled, they make answer—'We are but poor workmen who live by our trade. All that can be said for us is that when we meet anybody who seems sad, we join him and cheer him so long that he must forget his grief. And if we know of two people who have quarrelled, we talk to them and persuade them, until we have made them friends again.'"

With such parallels as these before us, and with the "Parliament of Religions" still fresh in our minds, can we combat Mrs. Besant's statement that "all that is fair and beautiful in Christian morality had been taught in the world ages before Christ was born"? Was Professor Clifford incorrect in affirming that the moral teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is just Rabbi Hillel recast? And if in moral teaching Jesus be not original and unique, how can He be peculiarly divine? If He be "an absolute," as Matthew Arnold claimed that He was, if He be *sui generis*, what differentiates Him from those whose gleams of truth are so like His own? Many troubled minds have been driven back from miraculous Christianity to the Sermon on the Mount, and have come to rest contentedly in it as the sure and pure and original religion of Jesus. But if *it* be taken away, what more have they left?

Before arguing the question, it must be

frankly stated that the above quotations are not specimens representative of the total mass of these Eastern writings. Such sifted selections from the Bibles of other nations are liable to mislead those who inquire no further. We receive our disenchantment when we set aside the tit-bits and peruse the "Sacred Books of the East" in their entirety. Professor Max Müller has lately admitted that in editing that series he has been compelled to exclude portions too shameful to bear publication and escape prosecution. As well compare the Sahara with England, because there are delicious oases relieving the barren desert.

The Talmud, which contains the saying that "it is better to be persecuted than to persecute," is yet confessedly "a gigantic rubbish heap." Those who have studied it with patriotic sympathy allow that it is a literary wilderness. Nor must we forget that, in its higher religious conceptions, it is the heir of

the Old Testament, and at many points its debtor.

The Essenes of Palestine, from whom Christ is by some supposed to have borrowed, while they condemn war, oaths, and the acquisition of wealth, and declare that all are priests to God alike, yet pay adoration to the sun as "a mediate God," live the lives of ascetic celibates, condemn all commerce and cities, and practise communism in food, property, and all else.

Confucius, who proclaims our Golden Rule in almost identical form, is at the same time an Agnostic as to God and the Future, and at best is but a sagacious statesman and prudential moralist.

Plato teaches that "it is not right to return an injury"; "holding the soul to be immortal and able to bear all good and evil alike, we shall always persevere in the road that leads upwards" (*Republic*). But it is the same Plato who insists that "the evil body must be left

to die, and the evil soul must be put to death"; that "the offspring of the bad must be exposed, and there must be a public nursery, and no mother must know her own child." A close scrutiny of the Persian (Zoroastrian), Egyptian, and Hindu Scriptures leads to the same result. They catch sight of single facets of the truth, and to that extent command our reverent admiration; but when their entire teaching is set side by side with that of Christ's, the difference is more striking than the resemblance.

This point, however, does not solve the problem, for these stars of truth still shine bright in a dark place, and some of them seem to anticipate the ethical flashes of Christ.

But why should we expect Christ to proclaim moral principles which had never been expressed by any seer before? Would it be any comfort to us, or any tribute to the Divine Revealer, to suppose that even

the prophetic souls among other races of humanity had been incapable of perceiving the moral principles upon which they were meant to live, until Christ came to startle the world with them in a novel system of ethics? To be true and Divine, must His moral teaching be altogether new and unforeseen? Must Christ Jesus, like Athanasius, teach "contra mundum," and *contra* the moral intuitions inwoven into man's being? That would be to exalt Christ at the expense of God's workmanship in the constitution of the human race. Christ's supremacy is diminished not a whit by the discovery that God has given hints and foregleams of full-orbed truth to other seers among the sons of men.

Strange irony it is that Protestants, who deny that grace is confined to the Church and its sacraments, should limit Divine illumination to the Christian section of the Father's family, and should even endeavour to prove "pagan" truth to be

error, and "pagan" glimpses of God to be masked deceptions of the devil! The New Testament is more liberal than that. The "Word" is not merely the local Jesus, but "the light that lighteth every man, coming into the world."

> "In Vedic verse, in dull Koran,
> Are messages of good to man;
> The angels to our Aryan sires
> Talk'd by the earliest household fires;
> The prophets of the elder day,
> The slant-eyed sages of Cathay
> Read not the riddle all amiss
> Of higher life evolved from this."

"At sundry times and in divers manners," His prophets, not only Jews, but Zoroaster and Confucius, Seneca and Socrates, have had foresight of higher truth to come. If in the interests of Christ's uniqueness it is not needful to depreciate Hebrew Psalmists and Seers, there is as small need to depreciate the Book of Thoth, the Zend Avesta, or the Rig Veda, which, while containing some flashes of light, yet on the whole come

far short even of the Old Testament in spiritual vision. As, according to both Genesis and Science, there was light before the sun, so there was moral illumination in the human spirit before Christ. And as light became centralised for our system in the sun, Christ gathered all light into His central fulness, and now radiates it to warm and cleanse the life of humanity.

> "Nor need it lessen what He taught,
> Or make the Gospel Jesus brought
> Less precious, that His lips re-told
> Some portion of the truth of old;
> Confirming with His own impress
> The common law of righteousness."

One of the distinctive features of Christ's moral teaching is that He seems to gather together in one the scattered truths and varied principles which other seers had separately perceived. Spinoza says that Jesus is unique in that, while other Masters bring fragments of the Divine, He brings the whole rounded mind of God. Is not His comprehensive union of the

best that has come from seers in all lands the real marvel and a mark of His supremacy? What each of the world's prophets partially saw and strove to utter is found stated more spiritually and universally by Christ. This point is put with simple grace in Whittier's "Miriam," a poem which I have to confess I had never discovered till after this chapter was first written, and from which I cannot but quote again.

"We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful;
And, weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest,
To find that all the sages said
Is in the book our mothers read,
And all our treasures of old thought
In his harmonious fulness wrought
Who gathers in one sheaf complete
The scattered blades of God's own wheat,
The common growth that maketh good
His all-embracing Fatherhood."

In the case of single threads in the tapestry of His teaching, we may find the like in other Masters; but in none can we

find these threads set in such a comprehensive design and woven into such a fabric as His.

He spiritualizes and broadens ethics. It is not merely that He makes the Golden Rule positive, while others leave it negative; nor that He lays the inward motives and intentions under the same ethical laws as outward conduct. Matthew Arnold is surely overstating the case in claiming that Christ's specialty is "inwardness." Other masters taught "inwardness," though not to the same perfection. Says the Talmud: "In every act it is especially the thought, the intention, which God looks at."

But when we set their choicest ethics in "the fatal parallel columns" with Christ's teaching, we perceive in His a pervading light as from a glowing spiritual sphere, the warm and subtle rays of heaven irradiating the cold rules of earthly duty. He takes confused and halting principles, and sets them in clearness and true perspec-

tive, and lifts them into the light of the Divine Face.*

He universalises moral law. He has been accused of lack of patriotism; but if He was silent about love of country—and one must remember that only condensed *memoranda* of His teaching are left to us—it was because He taught the love of mankind, universal patriotism, to which, perhaps, we are slowly approaching in our world-empires to-day. The very criticism reveals how far He is still ahead of us. In Rome foreigners had no rights. In Judea all Gentiles were "dogs." But Jesus broke down all "middle walls" of caste, race, and ceremonial. His Communion Table set master and slave, rich and poor, side by side in brotherhood, and gave prominence to the universal needs and the common humanity of all classes.

Then, truth is to Him not a mine of

* Newman Smyth's *Old Faiths in a New Light*, chap. V.; and cf. George Matheson's *Growth of the Spirit of Christianity*.

Ophir for the adventurer of speculative thought, but an equipment for life, the means of attaining the grandest end of all, namely, goodness of character and the vision of God. He does not go about *seeking* truth: He brings it. It is not the slow summing up of observation and experience: it wells up from a fountain within Himself. It is not laboriously forged in the study beside the night lamp: His utterances are *obiter dicta,* thrown off by the way. At a well's mouth, in the street, along a country road, or rocking in a boat by the beach, He drops sayings that glance far into the heart of things, lighting up the mind of God and the career and destiny of man—and all with the apparent ease and spontaneity suggestive of infinite stores in reserve.

Greater distinction still: He Himself embodies all ethics in His own character, and personifies His ideal. He is higher than all His laws. Seneca, spite of his ethical wisdom, fell so far as to become

the author of the shameful document in which Nero's murder of his mother was covered with falsehoods. Christ not only speaks the truth, but He *is* the Truth in His own self. Never man spake, all round, like this Man; and never man so outshone his words by the lofty perfection of his character and the unique divineness of his Personality. It is He in the quality of His own being that stands unique, original, "alone with the stars."

Equally original is His way of setting all ethics in a direct personal relation to the Father, and of evoking goodness of life by awaking love and devotion to Himself. It is the Copernican *versus* the Ptolemaic systems of astronomy over again. Ptolemy saw the same stars as Copernicus, but introduced cycles and epicycles to explain their complicated movements. Copernicus ranged the planets round the right centre, and all fell into place with beautiful simplicity. Christ took the very intuitions and experiences

which the seers of other lands had partially expressed, and He set them in relation to the great Centre, the living mind and sympathetic heart of the Father as imaged in the Son.

Plato made an effort to maintain the myths of the gods; but it was with an obvious consciousness that he was cultivating make-believe. Christ, on the contrary, gives historical background to His theology, sets it in historical actuality. Christ's picture of the Unseen is drawn, not as from the fancy of speculation, but as from the fact of real life. At the end we are left with a God no longer like the Shadow of the Brocken, or the dream of a poet, but a *living* God, palpitating with reality. Other Masters, to use Newman's words, "present no tangible history of the Deity." In Christ we are shown the "Life of God" so far as it actively concerns us human beings.

The ultimate secret of Jesus, however, lies deeper still. "Our life," said Byron,

"is a false nature; 'tis not in the harmony of things;" and he knew only too well what he was speaking about. This discord in human nature, by us called sin, is the world's common problem, Buddha's, Plato's, our own.

It is Christ's peculiar glory that He solves the problem of sin, not by satisfying intellectual speculations, but by curing the moral disease. His point of attack all along is not so much an error in the philosophy of evil, as the impotence of men in dealing with it. His great secret lies not so much in the Sermon on the Mount as in His nocturnal talk with Senator Nicodemus. The Magna Charta which contains most of Christ, and in which He rises to altitudes beyond the dreams of others, is embodied in those words before which every man, whatever his creed, must bare the head:—

"God so loved the world
That He gave His only-begotten Son,
That whosoever believeth in Him
Should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Such words as these were never heard on earth from any other. Buddha, too, is a man of sorrows. But he has no message of the conquest of sin by which the spirit of man may survive in conscious happiness and eternal life. There are stories in India and Greece of the gods coming down to men. But not one of them has a clear, verifiable historical setting — and they stand forth rather as dim prophecies of the truth than as parallels to Christ.

No other ever dreamed of the Eternal God as sharing the misery and bearing the sins of mortal men. Neither Buddha, nor Zoroaster, nor Plato, much less Seneca and Hillel, ever imagined the *Cross in God's nature.* And not only did Christ imagine it: He fulfilled it, acted it, personified it. He did even more—He distributed a new Power by which its cleansing force might be conveyed to men's hearts. His distinguishing "inwardness" appears in the Spirit He poured into humanity to vitalise, illumine, and purify. That such

a Spirit-Power has been at work among men the experience and evidence of numberless lives declare.

With such facts before us, we can scarcely question Christ's uniqueness and originality.

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts, how they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—
Call them forgery from A to Z!"
BROWNING'S
"Fears and Scruples."

VI

Old Letters of a Contemporary of Christ

Authentic Correspondence — Twenty-four Years after Christ—A Jewish Claverhouse—Missionary Letters —The Christianity they Reveal—The Christ-story and Legend.

THERE exist to-day some old letters, fragments of a correspondence part of which has been lost, written from twenty to twenty-eight years after Jesus disappeared. Their author was a contemporary of the Nazarene, and might possibly have seen Him at Jerusalem. He was a university man, having studied at the leading college of the capital, over which the most illustrious professor of the day presided. He was a young man, evidently of strong

mental calibre and masterly ability, and he always looked back upon his *alma mater* with pride.

The authenticity of these letters is universally admitted. Even those who differ from the views which they express, *e.g.* Renan, pronounce their genuineness to be "undisputed and indisputable." They are studded with bits of autobiography and the usual details of friendly letters, convey greetings to acquaintances by name, mention prospective visits, and make frequent reference to private and personal affairs.

As we hear of these letters, that take us back nearly 1,840 years, we are impatient to know whether they mention Jesus of Nazareth. If so, in what terms do they speak of Him? Is He merely a sage, moralist, and humanitarian? Has the story of the descent of the Divine Son begun to take shape at this early period?

An intuitive fear on this point has at times haunted us, and certain recent

writings have popularised the disturbing question. May not the Christ-story, like the legends of King Arthur and his Round Table, have gathered round a small kernel of fact and grown up slowly during the course of the first century? May not later generations have woven around the good Nazarene's head a halo of the miraculous and the Divine?

Fervently have we wished that the Palestine Exploration Fund might find some old documents that would settle the question and relieve our secret fears. Perhaps we have here the very documents we crave, as fresh and decisive as if they had been dug up yesterday, written by a contemporary of Christ, about His own age, who had been a student at Jerusalem, had left it apparently for a good many years, and then had returned soon after the Crucifixion, when the strange story was still novel.

From what he tells of his own history in these letters, and from other fairly trust-

worthy accounts, he appears to have been on intimate terms with the leading rabbis and other Jewish authorities in the city of David, and to have been an agent of the very set that had done Jesus to death. Being an energetic young man of, say, thirty-three, and an intense Jew, he developed into a sort of Claverhouse, commissioned to hunt these wretched Jesus-people; and, as he himself confesses, he harried their nest and struck terror into their hearts.

He incidentally tells his correspondents how, as he went about his inquisitorial work, he had been completely turned round, and how, himself a Christian now, he spent a fortnight with Peter and James at Jerusalem. Fifteen years later we find him a foreign missionary, away on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. He has been itinerating, and, upon halting at certain points on his tour, his mind goes back anxiously to the mission stations which he has been founding; and he sends letters to the companies of Christians he

has left behind him, advising, encouraging, instructing them and telling them of his own affairs and state of health.

Leaping back over the centuries and putting ourselves down at their date, Christ was put to death only twenty-four years ago, and here are letters from a missionary who became a Christian some twenty years ago, and has lived with Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and other Christians. They have been sent by hand over the sea, and lie before us, warm with the man's enthusiasm and personality. It all happened just about twenty-four years ago, and we are reading letters referring to it, letters never meant to be preserved or seen by later critical eyes.

How far is the Christ-story advanced as reflected in these letters? Is it only half grown? What was the sort of Christianity which he found in vogue and was constrained to believe twenty years ago? Dip into them anywhere and see.

Do they leave us in doubt whether Jesus was regarded at that contemporary hour as a superhuman manifestation, or only as a moral model? "The gospel of Christ, who is the image of God"; "Of whom is Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever." He is "the Lord of glory," whom "God sent in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Are the Cross and redemption as prominent in the contemporary ideas of Christ as they are to-day? "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; and the same idea recurs endlessly. What His dignity is we may gather from the statement that "we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ." "In the name of Jesus every knee shall bow."

Do they mention the Holy Spirit and miracles? "He that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you."

Do they give any hint of an existing belief in what our creeds call—perhaps

miscall—the Trinity? "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."

Do these letters refer to the resurrection of Jesus, as if it were an expanding legend still in its simpler shape? "Christ was buried and rose again the third day; after that He was seen by above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present," &c.

Is the Lord's Supper mentioned, and, if so, does the reference tally with the account of its origin given in the Gospels? "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks He brake it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you,' &c."

These fragments convey no adequate impression of the Divineness which the letter-writer sees in Christ, of the worshipping devotion poured out upon Him in every paragraph. Each page is radiant

with "the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But why does he make no mention of the miracles ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels? Are we to infer that they were not part of the story current at the time? But over and over again he quotes the Resurrection, the one great miracle in the life of Christ. Christ's whole origin, status, mission, work, and destiny, the writer pictures as the supreme miracle. The biographical events of Christ's life he mentions no more than His miracles, with the exception of the significant events at the close of that life. The reason in both cases alike is evidently that the author of these letters *has a mind for thoughts, doctrines, the philosophy of that life,* rather than for rehearsing its incidents. Moreover, the omission cannot point to Jesus as non-miraculous, for miracles are mentioned as still being wrought by the power of that Name.

A more serious difficulty regarding the

value of these documents meets us when we find traces of rival factions and hot disputes about Christian subjects. The writer betrays the fact that there are parties and teachers who oppose him and differ from him. What, then, if his statement of Christianity was not the Christianity generally received by the first disciples? The answer is that the very controversies disclosed in these letters make plain what exactly was in dispute and what was taken for granted as common ground. And it is found that the war of words does not rage round the person, the dignity, the resurrection, the redemption, of Christ. His opponents quarrel with him on two points, and apparently only two.

For one thing, they refuse to recognise his authority as an apostle, since he has not seen Christ in the flesh. We heartily thank them—as we thank Kingsley *re* Newman—for thus putting the man on his mettle and rousing him to an *Apologia*

pro vitâ suâ. For he is compelled to recount certain important portions of his history in vindication of his right to proclaim the Gospel. He protests that he has all the signs of an apostle, and, to boot, that he had spent a fortnight with Peter and other apostles who "gave me the right hand of fellowship."

The real dispute, the burning question, which threw the first Christians into opposing camps, was the question whether the "heathen," in entering the Christian Church, were to be saddled with Jewish rites and ordinances. One of these letters, indeed, was drawn from the writer by the relapse of a little mission community into Jewish legalism. Apparently the writer and Peter had once had a hot quarter of an hour over the latter's trimming policy and vacillation on this very matter. The only other questions raised in these letters are—whether the Second Advent was to occur forthwith; whether Christians ought to be ascetics and avoid certain meats;

whether prophecy was greater than speaking with tongues.

These very disputes, so frankly discussed, throw into stronger distinctness the unanimity of the first Christians upon the common truth they held regarding the Divine Christ and His redeeming mission. About Himself, His sublime dignity, His spiritual work, there is no faintest trace of a difference of opinion. Were the correspondent even striving to carefully *prove* these lofty conceptions of Christ, one might be disposed to infer that these conceptions were not universally received. But as to Christ Himself, apparently they all occupy common ground. Some had, indeed, denied the resurrection of their own bodies. He bases his reply and argument on an apparently *accepted* fact, the resurrection of Christ. "If [as we know] Christ rose, so must we all."

Note particularly that in these letters, and indeed in all early documents and local records, there is no trace of any party

who conceived Jesus to have been a purely human and ethical teacher. *If* such a view of Him existed at the time, why no scrap of writing, no little band of disciples, no single spokesman apparently, left to represent that view of Him?

But what if these early communities of Christians merely adopted a peculiar Christianity of the missionary's own making, much as converts in some parts of China and Africa take over the Romish or Protestant type of Christianity which the missionary brings to them? What if we have, in the current ideas to be found in these first communities of disciples, merely an echo of a peculiar philosophy of Christianity taught by the preacher of it? The answer comes when it is found that one of these letters was addressed to the Christians at Rome; that the writer had never visited that city; and that the letter addressed to them presupposes a representation of Christ as lofty and divine as that which appears in the other

letters. The Christians in that capital had apparently received from other teachers a type of Christianity identical with his own.

Now, it is well known that sceptical critics suppose—and here the tug of war comes—that the story of the humanitarian Rabbi grew as it went; that like other half-legendary histories, as eye-witnesses died and new generations, greedy of the marvellous, heard the tale retold, the Nazarene teacher became gradually transfigured, encircled with a halo of the supernatural. Hence critics who have this conviction deep in their minds strive to bring the date of the Gospels far down into the second century. They do this in order to allow time for legendary additions to grow and gather round the early story.

But these old letters, by all admitted to be genuine, and written within twenty-four years of the events—do they carry the reflection of a half-developed legend

of Jesus? How much of the Gospel history and creed do they contain?

They incidentally mention—and they are not a biography of Him, but mere fragments of a correspondence — that Jesus was, "according to the flesh" (on the human side) "born of a woman," yet had "emptied Himself and become poor," and, indeed, was "God blessed for ever." They incidentally state that He had "brothers," one of whom was named James, and that three of His twelve apostles were Peter, James, and John. They picture One who "knew no sin," was meek and gentle, pleased not Himself, —and much more of the sort. They mention that, anticipating His crucifixion, He established a memorial supper in bread and wine; that He was betrayed, put to death on a cross, and buried; that He was raised from the dead on the third day; that He was afterwards personally seen by the Eleven, and by hundreds still living at the date of the letters; that He

now sits at the right hand of God to make intercession for us, having sent the Holy Spirit and His miraculous gifts; that He will come again to judge the world; and that meanwhile we are redeemed and sanctified in Him.

The great facts of His life, the great central truths common to the creeds, are here. The Christ of these letters is as complete, the story as fully developed, as what we find in the four Gospels themselves. Could such a ripe and rounded legend, so well knit and firmly built, grow up in the course of twenty-four years? Every literary student knows that legends require fifty to a hundred years to take form; but here, twenty-four years after the events, the story is complete, and embodied in an inter-continental correspondence.

Nor is the story being broached for the first time. It is not just emerging. Not only has it been proclaimed at Jerusalem, but missionaries have already gone forth

to the foreign mission field with it, as far relatively as China is from us to-day; and these are letters from one of the pioneers to his little mission communities. Christianity has already been preached to multitudes and welcomed by numbers in the great cities all round the Mediterranean, and here are letters to the converts over the sea hundreds of miles away.

They take us much farther back even than that. The writer himself had been a Christian about twenty out of these twenty-four years; had been in Jerusalem shortly after the Crucifixion; as a persecutor, had known what could be said against the new cult and its Founder; and had associated with the Apostles and personal companions of Jesus, both at Jerusalem and at Damascus. He knew what had been the current story of Christ, both among foes and friends, within four years of the events. There was no dreamy interval, during which poetic longings

could expand and crystallize into legends, and finally wrap their hero in a nimbus of wonder-working and Divinity.

He was on the spot about the time; met the actors in the tragedy on both sides; was first an enemy, then convinced of his error; had since, as appears in these letters, been thrice beaten, thrice shipwrecked, once stoned, five times had received forty stripes save one—all, and much more, for the sake of the subject of the story. And here are his very letters, free, frank, and fresh, as if hot from his hand yesterday, the ardent outpourings of his heart, never meant to be scanned by alien eyes: and they contain all the Christianity we hold dear. Where, then, are you going to get in your slow-growing legends?

It will not do to dismiss this testimony because the writer is Paul, and his letters are in the canon. We are entitled to take them as ordinary human witnesses, so far as they are genuine. I am not, for the

nonce, assuming that what they teach is *true*. I am not here building an argument on their worth as theology, but on the merely historical evidence they contain as to the state of development which contemporary Christianity had reached. I am using them simply because they are universally allowed to have been written by this man, and because they serve to show one thing, the single purpose of this paper: that fully developed Christianity was, at any rate, currently believed and preached during the first twenty years of its career.

The author of "Robert Elsmere" called this man "the fallible man of genius, so weak logically (!!), so strong in poetry, in rhetoric, in moral passion." Ah! it was all poetry and rhetoric? The knout with which he was scourged and his shipwrecks and stonings would, you would think, have taken the poetry out of him. His back is all scarred with the marks of sufferings willingly endured for very love

to his message and his Master; and yet elegant writers and dainty theorists come forward to tell us that it was all poetry and rhetoric! Whose is the poetry, I wonder—Paul's or their own?

Renan thinks Paul may have preached the Resurrection knowing it to have been a fraud. Strange man Paul! Strange people in these ancient days, glad to trudge far, and suffer the lash and the loss of all things, and ready to be killed, all for the love of a fraud!

Do not befool us. Let us get these old letters back again, yellow with 1,840 years, blotted with the writer's tears, yet lit up with One Name and one deathless faith and hope. And as I read them once more, my heart, struck dumb by the challenge of the critic, rushes out to join the writer as he exclaims: "Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"That one Face, far from vanish,
rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels
and knows."

BROWNING

VII

The Real Jesus?

Back to Beginnings—False Christs—The Original Jesus Supernatural?—Memoirs under the Lens—M. Arnold's "Absolute"—Miracle of the Perfect Man—Shylock's Knife—Warp of Words and Woof of Works—The Inwardness of Miracle—Apocrypha.

THE men of to-day desire to find the Real Jesus. It is the spirit of realism, the quickened historic sense, that impels them to penetrate to the primitive Christ. No ancient figure, neither Homer nor King Arthur nor Jesus, can escape from the grasp of the scientific method. The demand of the modern truth-seeker is—Back to the beginnings of Christianity; back to the actual Founder of it; back beyond creeds and organizations to the original Jesus!

Tolstoi, in his own characteristic manner, is calling Europe back to the Nazarene. Renan and Wendt represent other modes

of the modern return to Christ. Some of these attempts may be pronounced to be crude and mistaken; but they indicate the spirit of the time. Even if failures, they render a service by showing certain reconstructions of Christ to be impossible. They belong to a movement which is, on the whole, healthy and justifiable, though exposed to risks which must not be overlooked. It is not always scientific realism that conveys the amplest truth. In the representation of the greatest types of character, as in the elaboration of great paintings, the perfectly true and full impression is conveyed, not by the insertion of each literal detail, but by the embodiment of the mental interpretation and idea of the subject. It is not the realist standing nearest to the bare facts of the Nazarene's history who necessarily receives the truest conception of His Personality. Yet this return to the "Real Jesus" is justified and required as a corrective to the conventionalities of theological

idealism, which had departed so far from the original of Christianity.

There have been False Christs other than Bar Cochba and pretenders of his sort. Some of the Conventional Christs are very False Christs indeed.

The Christ of Catholic Art, whatever beauty and feeling it may enshrine, is in many instances, a false Christ. It is the mediæval ideal of saintliness. It is sickly and die-away, when it should be strong and manly. Its upturned eye is languishing, its attitudes of piety affected, its face not merely expressive of pity, but of effeminacy. The glory of the great painters' art has, perhaps, concealed from appreciative observers this historical misconception. But I am deeply convinced that mediæval paintings, however sublime, have unwittingly done irreparable injury by imprinting on men's imagination a distorted conception of Christ. It is from this sentimental and monastic Jesus that

many minds have experienced a revulsion, and not from the Jesus of the "Memoirs."

The Christ of Theology, too, has often hid from view the living Jesus. I do not refer to the merits of any theology, but to the construction and erection of a theological figure, a walking system of doctrines, with little left of palpitating personality in it. Men cannot, of course, interpret Christ and His teachings without reaching certain religious truths which, if put in stated form, are dogmas. They cannot think out Christianity without finding some sort of theology in it. But these systems of theology have often been set up as if *they* were Christ, as if He were a collocation of abstract dogmas. From this a revulsion has come, which has swung, perhaps, far toward the opposite extreme. Even at this risk it is well that men should go back and look on the personal Christ with their own eyes, and not with the eyes of others.

The Clerical Christ, the professional priest, must also stand aside. It is a False Christ who is associated with holy orders, services, Sundays, and funerals. The Real Christ was the Great Layman, and lay minds want to see Him in His unmitred reality.

What, then, and Who, was Jesus? Few, if any, can regard this as a mere puzzle of ancient history, or can handle the case as nothing more than a problem of documents and dates. An instinct in us makes us feel that upon Him hangs half our spiritual world. The mysteries of life and death and the powers of the unseen seem gathered into a focus in Him. He catches the eye, and fills the imagination, and dominates the heart as one in touch with the strange other-world. Sacred hopes and potent inspirations and spiritual secrets appear bound up in Him. The weight that hangs on Christ is the world on Atlas' shoulders. It is this sense of fateful issues that fills the search for

Jesus with burdensome awe. Hence the eager desire of men—who would care little about the identity of a merely greater Junius or finer Thomas à Kempis—to leap across the centuries, to stand in the heart of Christ's times, to breathe His air, and know Him at first hand.

This is more possible to-day than it has been for fifteen hundred years. We stand nearer to the times of Christ than did the men of the fourth century. Critical and historical knowledge, the studies of numberless scholars, have brought the scenes and circumstances of His life closer to us than they were to the Fathers.

The net result of critical scrutiny has been to make Jesus stand out in greater relief against a clearer background than ever. The assaults of German critics, which stirred alarm in devout breasts at first, have served to disclose solid ground where much was untested before. The nimbus, the haze, has vanished. Strauss's theory is dead; and Christ now stands forth,

at any rate no myth, more vividly real, more distinctly marked than ever.

Now, was the original Jesus non-miraculous?

1. Is it not possible that there were earlier writings in which He was presented in simpler and more human guise than that in which He appears in the Four Memoirs?

The lens of Criticism does reveal the existence of earlier writings. Two are distinctly visible. One is a collection of *Logia* or *Sayings*. The other is a *Narrative* containing a record of incidents and dialogues. It might help to settle some grave perplexities if it were possible to peer *through* the existing Memoirs into the more primitive writings and discover what sort of Person they reflect, whether a Hebrew sage and human philanthropist, or a Divine Son.

It *is* possible to peer through to the original Jesus. The scrutineer finds that the very incidents and dialogues which

our present writers drew from the earlier Memoranda are remarkable for their superhuman elements. The primitive "Sources" are devoted mainly to descriptions of the "works" or miracles which Jesus wrought, and the Divine authority with which He spoke. No investigator fails to find that the earlier writings were miracle-histories. Even the *Logia*, it is now admitted by the keenest critics,* contained memoranda of history and of miracle with which His teachings were intertwined.

The Second Memoir — named after "Mark"—has admittedly most in common with the earlier *Narrative*, and "Mark," as every reader perceives, presents graphic pictures of Christ's marvellous "works," even more than of His words. Out of various theories as to the composition of the Three Memoirs, one fact emerges into clearness; the farther back towards the

* Holtzman has surrendered to this conclusion, which may be accepted as settled.

available original sources one goes, the more certain does it appear that the earliest portrait of Jesus of which we can obtain a glimpse, did not represent a mere Nazarene Sage, but a Person of Divine powers and unique dignity.*

2. But can we not disentangle all miraculous threads from the Gospels, and retain a purely spiritual Christianity? If the miracles were at one time the decisive authentication of the Christian faith, now in many quarters they seem to be its heaviest incubus. "If only we could eliminate the miraculous excrescences—!"

But it would not be enough to lop off only the material miracles. When Kant and Professor T. H. Green, followed by Dr. Abbot in his *Kernel and the Husk*,

* The "Triple Tradition"—the biographical sections which are found common to the Three Synoptists—contains three parables and eleven miracles, the latter including several miracles of healing, the feeding of the five thousand, and the stilling of the storm. Thus it contains much more miracle than parable. If the portion common to the "Three" be any measure of the primitive con-

removed the physical wonders from Christ's life, but retained a sinless, ideal Son of Man, they did not rid their religion of the supernatural. Sinlessness is as much a miracle as the power to raise the dead. It involves escape from hereditary taints in the blood of the human race. It implies the repeal of the *great entail.* It is an impossibility without a miraculous "immaculate conception" of a new kind, a great exception to the law of heredity. Moreover, it contradicts all experience, and, on Hume's principle, is incapable of proof.

At the first blush it may seem an easier thing to believe in a Perfect Man, the unique and stainless Son of Man or Type of Humanity, than in the Supernatural Incarnate Son of God. Matthew Arnold humanises Jesus, and at the same time speaks of Him thus: "Jesus Himself is

ception of Jesus, it gives an unhesitating confirmation of the picture of the lofty Personality charged with special powers which is presented in the "Memoirs."

an *absolute;* we cannot explain Him, cannot command Him. He is therefore the perfection of an ideal, and it is as an ideal that the Divine has its best worth and reality."*

But if we are to take the language seriously—that is to say, if Matthew Arnold is not surrendering to the natural temptation to paint the human Jesus in colours as closely resembling the Divine Christ as possible—such a Being is not according to nature. He would be as great a breach of the uniformity of nature's laws as would His rising from the dead. The moral sphere is as much subject to uniformity as the physical; and if Naturalism is to rule out the supernatural as presented in the miracles attributed to Jesus, it is bound to rule out the "absolute," the ultra-normal from His person and rank. Some minds may still conceive the latter more rational and credible than the former—and we have no wish to drive the

* *Literature and Dogma,* Preface to last edition.

brave into a desperate consistency. But let them not misconceive the situation by claiming that they have got rid altogether of the supernatural.

The urgent question is this: Can we lift out the miraculous—all the *Aberglaube* of Matthew Arnold—from the "Memorabilia," and leave a credible Christ?

Making the experiment with "Matthew's Gospel," it seems to promise success. The *Sayings* of Christ are grouped together in the early chapters: the Miracles follow in a mass in Chapters ix. and x.: and, with these cut away, we have extricated as many as ten miraculous sections. But a number are found scattered through other chapters: such cures as in the cases of the Syrophœnician woman, the withered hand, the lunatic boy, not to speak of the greater ones at the end of the Life.

The serious thing in the operation is that, in removing the miracles from

"Matthew," we find we are tearing away much of the loftiest truth taught by Christ. Like Shylock's threatened excision of the pound of flesh, the knife lets much blood and imperils the very life requiring to be preserved. When we try the same experiment with the other Gospels, we unfortunately seem to lose not only the thirty-three miracles, but also the very deeds and teachings which have made Christ the greatest humanitarian and the most spiritual guide.

Is anything more certainly Christ's and more characteristic of His mind than His broad and humane interpretation of the Sabbath law? Yet His teaching on that question is organically embedded in the miracles by which He appeared to desecrate the day.* It is scarcely possible to doubt that His scathing exposure of Pharisaical hypocrisy is true to the "Real Jesus." Yet it is drawn from Him by a demand for a miracle, and the demand is answered by

* St. Luke xiii. 14 ff., xiv. 4, 5.

the promise of a sign like to Jonah's three days' burial.

The crucial point seems to be this: where do we get our conception of Jesus as the first of humanitarians, or our sense of His large-hearted sympathy? Not mainly from the *sayings* of the sage. Rather from the very stories which tell how He helped and healed the suffering and distressed. In our hearts He occupies a throne far above Socrates, and that not mainly in virtue of superior ethics, but in virtue of His active philanthropy. What evidence, however, have we of that active philanthropy other than the "mighty works," misnamed miracles?

"The Miraculous Element in the Gospels," says Professor Bruce, in his book bearing that title, "is no mere excrescence or external adjunct easily separable from the body of the history, but an essential portion of it, closely woven into the fabric, vitally connected with the organism. Words and works are so united that the

one divorced from the other would in many cases become unintelligible."

Taking out the superhuman from the Memoirs, we find that the Personality of Christ has been robbed of those very colours and features which cannot be spared from the portrait. The trial and crucifixion would remain as bare events; but the most significant and impressive things alike in Gethsemane, in the Courts, and at the Cross must disappear. Perhaps there was a last Supper and a parting address; but both are emasculated when all the superhuman in their meaning is taken away. It is scarcely possible to retain such language as this: "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." "Let not your heart be troubled: I will come again and receive you unto Myself," &c. It is true that the incident contains no miracle, but both incident and language are saturated with claims and assertions which imply superhuman dignity, know-

ledge, and functions on the part of Jesus. Of course, the Resurrection and Ascension must go, too, and all that depends thereon—the walk to Emmaus, the doubt of Thomas, the restoration of Peter. And in the story of the great three years, the transfiguration, the lament over Jerusalem, the interviews with Zacchaeus, Nathanael, and the woman at the well, are not necessarily expunged *in toto* but deprived of their best elements and of that spiritual *differentia* which has made them significant and dear.

Surely the Parables will remain? Obviously many of them may. Yet in the Parable of the "Sower" He says, "The Son of Man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend." And this superhuman bit is not foreign to the parable, but laid deep in its essence. After the "Ten Virgins" and the "Faithful Servant" follows immediately, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, then

shall He sit upon the throne of His glory . . . and the King shall answer, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'" Is there anything more surely Christ's than this saying that the service of man is the service of God? Russell Lowell takes it as the marrow of Christ's teaching, and the keynote of some of his best poems—*e.g.*, "A Parable," "The Search." Yet it is inextricably interlaced with the "Son of Man coming in His glory." And even the dignity involved in "ye have done it unto ME" involves the ultra-human, and, in fact, the apparent identity of "the Son of Man" with the final Arbiter of men.

Even the "Sermon on the Mount" is not without its threads of the superhuman. It records no physical miracle, but lines of the divine run through it all. For example, who is *He* that He should be appealed to in the last assize thus: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord,

have we not prophesied in Thy name?' . . . Then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me.'"

Who is He, and what His rank and authority, that He should make Himself Lord of the Sabbath and of the Law; should reveal the Father and promise the Spirit; should take Isaiah's prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" to Himself and say, "Isaiah spoke of Me"?

The world stands by in admiration as Jesus sets a child in the midst and makes it a type of His own Kingdom; but embedded in that scene lie the words, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," reflecting surely a more than normal human mission.

A nameless fascination lies in the words, blotted with the tears of thousands of burdened hearts, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Prophets and Psalmists had bidden men seek God, "rest in the Lord"; but this One says, "Come

unto *Me.*" And this gentle call follows and is linked with the words, "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."

Men whose Christianity consists of the Sermon on the Mount are confronted by the fact that, in revealing the Father, proclaiming the new laws of the kingdom, and forecasting the judgment, even that non-miraculous sermon is lined with the supernatural, veined deeply with the divine. Professor Huxley evidently felt this, and boldly proceeded to cut away the Lord's Prayer with the rest.

Here is a Figure woven in the warp of spiritual ethics and the woof of "mighty works," the truth often as superhuman as the miracles. From this Figure, which has held the world spell-bound, draw out all the threads that are not purely human; and along with them come away the richest colours and lines in His unselfish sympathy, His truth and nobility. What is left is not a re-

cognisable Figure. He has been reduced to little more than a mere collection of moral maxims. The movement, the life in the face, the colouring and perspective have gone, and we have only a skeleton left with little to love or to stir us.

In theory miracles are quite separable from the essence of Christianity—for they are only means to an end, that end spiritual perception of Himself, and, as a matter of fact, most men do not now actually depend upon any wonder-working as an authorization of Him. Yet they are vital to Christianity as the body is vital to the human spirit: they give form and actuality to the message and gospel of Christ.

Not that physical wonders can prove the *spiritual* authority of Christ. Among His contemporaries such wonders were no final proof of goodness or truth, for some were attributed to the power of Beelzebub. They only challenge attention, and prove the possession of a certain exceptional power. Real divinity and

authority must be proved to the spirit spiritually.

> "This book's fruit is plain,
> Nor miracles need prove it any more."

The miracles are vital rather as *media*, revealers, than as physical wonders. While the Divine dignity of Christ is not so poorly vested as to depend upon material proofs, yet the "mighty works" are most important as exhibitions, revelations, radiators of the Divine in Him. Their function is to reveal Him—as being, for example, the healer and the life-giver. "Thy sins be forgiven thee," He said to one, and was naturally greeted with the exclamation, "The blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God only?" Then he bade the sick man "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," asking which was the greater feat, to forgive sins or to raise the sick? The "work" was offered to illustrate and verify the spiritual and greater work He came to perform for the heart.

* * * * *

3. The ultimate difficulty in many minds is the suppressed or confessed feeling that miracle, however enshrined in halo, is an impossibility. The miraculous is contrary to nature. Can a breach of its laws be entertained in face of universal experience?

Now, I grant that it is contrary to Nature *with Man left out*, but not to Nature with Man as part of it. Whenever he lifts his hand, a man works a miracle, if, under materialism, man's will be ignored. No law of Nature can account for it. By the mysterious action of our will -and the passage between the mind and the physical organs Tyndall admits to be an insoluble mystery—we overcome the law of gravitation. Violate the laws of Nature I cannot: for they are fixed and inviolable; but my will force can manipulate and supersede them. Is not God as free and immanent in His creation as my will in my body? Can He not operate through His universe-body without breaking its laws?

For aught we know Dr. Abbot may be on right lines in attributing Christ's cures to a supreme use of powers, of which we have a hint in faith-healing; to the power of one mind over others' minds. One might point out that this higher kind of mind-cure could not apparently account for the raising of the widow's son and of Lazarus, nor for some others among the miracles. But even if they could all be supposed to be the production of some supreme faculty which Jesus possessed, the result would still be as wonderful as ever, as unaccountable on ordinary grounds.

It is but a guess in which fancy indulges, but it is more than a bare possibility, that Christ used forces as yet unknown to man, but natural in their own plane. Why not? Apparently God regularly uses means. It is surely false to imagine that a miracle is wrought with a magical "Hey! presto!" and without agency, *contrary* to all Nature known or unknown to us. The power of the mind over other

minds, the power of intelligence to employ the printer's type to convey ideas, the powers of the human conscience, are miracles to the dimly-intelligent dog, and even to the savage. Clairvoyance, clair-audience, hypnotism, point to the existence of human powers as yet imperfectly understood. With the advances of recent years before our minds, we can scarcely dare to say that a Divine Christ could not use higher powers perfectly "natural" in their own higher plane, though apparently unnatural to us from our lower plane.

The fact is that the miracles of the *Memorabilia* cannot be studied fairly except in relation to Him from whom they proceeded.

This is not a mere question of "pig-bedevilment," or wonder-working. It is a question of Jesus Christ, and of what is *natural* to such an One. Huxley used his unsurpassed powers of debate, sharp wit, and incisive English to slay the miraculous. For him, as far as his articles revealed,

the question of the supernatural is mainly an argument on "pig-bedevilment." He practically ignores Christ as if He were a mere accident in the case: Eginhard's name might be substituted. How can he fairly estimate the supernatural when, as an Arch-Agnostic, he knows no God, no supernatural Being, who might be the *causa efficiens*, and when he studies the miracles apart from the character, status, and general mission of Jesus? John Stuart Mill admits that if there be a God the difficulty about the miraculous sinks into insignificance.

We may go further and say that mighty works, which in other cases would be unbelievable, are natural when they belong to such an One as the revealing, redeeming Christ. "Miracles do not happen," said Robert Elsmere. "Then it is a miracle if they do not," was Mr. Andrew Lang's retort. In Him, I contend, they are no marvels.

"Suppose," says Matthew Arnold in his *Literature and Dogma*, "that I could

change the pen with which I write into a pen-wiper, I should not make what I write any the truer or more convincing." Was there ever an illustration of the moral significance of miracle so grossly and gratuitously misrepresentative? We cannot believe it to have been in Arnold's mind to compare Christ's miracles with the irrational changing of a pen into a pen-wiper! A man of such culture and personal kindliness—how could he fail to see high moral significance in most of Christ's miracles,—with the exception, I admit, of the Gadarene story—or to observe how they are contributory to His revealing, hope-bringing mission? How like Himself they are! No plagues or Sinai thunders: but health-giving, life-giving, faith-giving, redemptive, and Father-like! They illustrate in act His pity, and verify the Father's love. He "wrought with living hands the creed of creeds."

They are all significant. Harvests seem to us mere works of impersonal nature:

the loaves and fishes are multiplied and show that harvests are but a slow miracle, and the gift of the same Father. Disease and death are repealed, and show how He is the life-bringer, the resurrection, and the life. They are all concrete parables and revelations, the *media* of the Divine thought to men.

The Apocryphal writings of the Christian era ascribe miracles to Jesus, and one is always prepared to hear them quoted in the argument. But they tell of Him turning children into kids for refusing to play with Him; making birds of clay and then bidding them fly; or carrying water in His cloak. They make Him appear a petted, passionate, spiteful, and silly child. They thus show up by contrast and confirm the "mighty works" of the *Memorabilia*, exhibiting what sort of things a myth-making fancy would have invented.

There is nothing more remarkable than the absence of "miracle-mongering" from the Gospel History: the restraint and the

calm lofty character to be observed in them all. When we see the wild extravagance and silly absurdity of the crop that sprang up a little later, we ask the question—If the Gospel miracles were imagined, who were these lofty minds that conceived miracles of such unique purity and significance? As well attribute the Waverley novels to an average scribbler as attribute these to common men.

Spiritualists are wise not to call up the shades of Shakespeare and Milton from the vasty deep. For when such men have been called back, their utterances have been significantly unworthy of them in their best days: their genius has deserted them! Oh, what a falling off was there! If skilful spiritualists cannot make Shakespeare's spirit rise to the old level, could a fisherman of Galilee or a tax-gatherer of Judea attribute to Christ either a saying or a miracle that would be worthy of Him and not detract from His credit?

Huxley has quoted the miracles ascribed to the bones of the saints, and selected a good man, Eginhard, who was hoaxed into belief in them. But it was a story of trickery, the saint being the dupe and victim. In Christ's case, who would be the trickster and who the dupe? Christ who has been the world's good angel a trickster!

To repudiate all miracles because some have been spurious is as if a magistrate were to say to a person charged on suspicion, "Fellow, there are a great many criminals about, so I have not the least doubt of your guilt, and I sentence you to imprisonment."

Christ Himself is the Grand Miracle. No matter how that Figure came together: He stands intrinsically supreme, above all dating of documents. If the warp is human, the woof is superhuman; and the whole cannot be accounted for on ordinary historical principles.

"Suppose that Plato and Newton never lived. But who did their wonders and thought their thoughts?"—THEODORE PARKER.

VIII

The Four Pictures and the One Original

Documents dissected—How composed—Earlier Memoranda—Aeneas—John Sterling—Fiction-work—Socrates—Three Photographs—A Fourth—"That One Face"—Whence?—Artless Art.

LYING on my table are four tiny booklets which have come down to us from about the first century. We are accustomed to see them bound up with other sacred writings in a single volume; but originally they were separate and largely distinct publications. Laying them open, we find that they contain short sketches of the same life.

The Pigott-Parnell letters, photographed and enlarged to ten times their normal size, were not searched for the marks of forgery with keener eyes than

those which have scrutinised these booklets. They have been put under the most powerful lenses of Modern Criticism. They have been scanned by friends and foes alike, who, with German patience, have made this task their life-work. They have been taken to pieces and analysed by the philologist, and the archæologist, and the critical historian. Sure never did a fiercer light beat upon any documents than has been focused on these brief fate-laden writings.

What has been the net scientific result? Or are the critical scholars sufficiently agreed to enable us to sum up results? In respect of details there are questions that still remain *sub judice*; but certain broad conclusions are agreed upon with practical unanimity. Some of these conclusions have been stated in the preceding chapter. Others will be submitted in the chapter which is to follow. Processes and reasons cannot be given in a book like this.

The important point for the purpose of

the present discussion is that these Four Memoirs have each an independent value as varied portraits of the one Original.

It is instructive to observe what proportion of each Memoir is specially its own.

"Mark"	has only	7 per cent.	of its contents peculiar to itself.
"Matthew"	„	42	„
"Luke"	„	59	„
"John"	„	92	„

"Mark" is generally accepted as the oldest of the Four. The writer of "Matthew," most critics agree, has made use of two earlier writings—(1) *Logia* or *Sayings* interwoven with brief historical memoranda, and (2) a *Narrative* of events, —as stated in the preceding chapter. The writer of "Luke" opens his Memoir by referring to previous attempts to sketch the life of Christ, and expresses his wish to give a consecutive narrative of what took place. "John" is a later and supplementary account.

But whilst the First and the Third Memoirs make some use of earlier writings, all of them are distinctive, separate accounts, not simply different re-statements of the same original, nor merely new compilations of the same materials, but diverse biographies of independent value. In Genesis the critic's eye, and almost the naked eye, can detect the two or more original histories which the compiler welded together, for the welding has left its marks on the very surface of the record. Such is not true of the Memoirs, which display few of the marks that indicate a process of welding. Each writer, while sketching the same life, possesses his own information, introduces independent materials which are in keeping with the rest, and casts the whole story in his own mould.*

* See the masterly analysis of the Three Synoptists by Dr. E. Abbot in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, article "Gospels"; also A. Wright's *Composition of the Gospels*, Badham's *Formation of the Gospels*, Sanday's articles in *The Expositor*, 1891, and the

The discovery of earlier writings—*Logia*, memoranda—which may appear at first sight to weaken the value of the Memoirs, really adds strength to their historical worth. For it brings to light some new witnesses and authorities at a date farther back and nearer to the events recorded. And these earlier memoranda, it is found as previously stated, contain the same combination of the human and the superhuman as are presented in the Memoirs.

With our modern ideas of journalism and book-making, we wonder why the earliest disciples, and particularly the Apostles, should not have sat down and written out full narratives of the great Three Years. But such a thing would never occur to them. They would be full of their story and eager to give it to the world *viva voce*. They were expecting

Introductions by Westcott, Dods, &c. On the subject of the Fourth Gospel—which would require separate treatment—see Watkins's laborious work, *Modern Criticism*.

their Master back again without long delay, even during their own lifetime. To record the story of His life then was therefore quite needless.

The necessity for written memoranda would arise, not only as years went by and the Master delayed His coming, but as persecution scattered the circle of disciples and the dispersed witnesses made converts in remote districts or foreign towns, among whom the want of narratives of Christ's life and teaching would be felt. It is no surprise to us, therefore, to find traces in our present Gospels of earlier sketches and memorabilia. They give historic probability to the authenticity of the "Memoirs" and their story. It is not even necessary to settle questions of authorship in order to gain their value.

Now, comparing these ancient canvases, do they present the same Figure? Is He sufficiently lined with actuality, and thrown into living projection? Or is He vague and shifting in the shifting mist?

Æneas, hero of the Trojan war, according to one account, fought faithfully in defence of Troy. But another account given by Strabo describes him as betraying his country to the Greeks. When Troy was in flames, say some, he escaped with his father Anchises on his shoulder, and set sail for Mount Ida, where he constructed a fleet of twenty ships. Other versions affirm that he rebuilt Troy and reigned over it; while still others trace him to Italy and make him ancestor of Rome's kings.

Half-historical, half-legendary heroes are never alike in different accounts. They take one shape in one region, another in another. Each compiler presents his own selection of stories, according to his fancy or to local tradition. If most of the Christ stories were composite tales such as are found springing up in legendary ages, should we not find here, too, a Figure varying according to the varying collections of stories?

Here are three collections of supposed "Memoirs," each contributing a considerable amount of fresh and distinct material, and each giving a distinct and characteristic presentation of the strange Life. Yet is it not the same, consistent, unique Being in them all? If after all He was merely a Hebrew sage, it is curious that no purely human account was left of Him: not a trace, not a hint of any such conception existing in the earliest times; no sign, by reflection or in controversy, of such an idea of Jesus. Even the early heretics do not dispute the Gospel histories: they differ from the orthodox only in questions of doctrine.

Hare's monograph on Sterling did not appear to Carlyle to be a rounded and accurate picture of its subject; Carlyle felt constrained accordingly to set down his own impression of the Hurstmonceaux curate. Strange — supposing many to have known Jesus to be but a Nazarene sage—that no one appears to have written

a narrative intended to correct the superhuman pictures given by the three!

A writer of fiction, study the times and manners as best he might, would find it extremely difficult, perhaps quite impracticable, to delineate a character in which the Divine and human had to be interlaced. To blend the two harmoniously and rationally without producing a monstrosity or landing himself in absurd inconsistencies, would indeed be a feat. For *three* writers to do so, and for their productions to harmonise with each other, would be both an achievement and a coincidence as incredible as the Gospel story of Christ seems to some to be.

In these Three accounts, Christ is a harmonious, rational, consistent character: not an Æneas, nor a King Arthur; not an airy, ghostly sprite at one time, and a stagey or passionate hero at another, but man throughout, "human at the red-ripe of the heart," yet always something more than human.

The Socrates of Xenophon is, in spite of differences of detail and different points of view, the same personality and sage as the Socrates of Plato. As apparent is it that the First writer's portrait of Christ, and those of the Second and the Third, with all their variations, present consistently the same striking Figure—and that Figure, too, without a parallel!

Says one: "The portraiture of the Christ of the Gospels is a work beyond the power of the philosophers; certainly then beyond the imagination of fishermen of Galilee. We know they could not have originated it, as we know that Peter could not have chiselled out of the marble the beauty of the Apollo Belvedere, or Paul have painted that wonder of art, the Sistine Madonna. The original of the Evangelists' portraiture of Jesus would remain the great wonder of humanity even though it could be proved, as it never has been proved, that the Gospels are copies of copies. We have reason to

thank the rationalistic critics that, as one result of their microscopical study of the beginnings of Christianity, it is becoming more difficult for us to conceive of the *spontaneous* generation of the Church from the historical conditions of the first century. The miraculous conception of the image of His character in the mind of some unlearned Galilean of the first century, or some unknown writer of the second century, would be a greater tax upon our credulity than any of the mighty works recorded in the Gospels." *

A half-legendary figure is usually heroic, magnificent: rides forth on his prancing steed, challenges the gaping admiration of the world. The "Three" describe Christ as unpopular, poor and a friend of the poor, outcast and a comrade of the outcast, and ending His life in shame and defeat. In none of the "Memoirs" does He work a miracle for His own advantage; His restraint in the use of "signs" is more

* Newman Smyth's *Old Faiths in New Light.*

wonderful than the "signs" themselves. In all of them His tremendous claims of Divine power and authority would brand Him as a half-crazy fanatic, were it not that His personal meekness, unselfishness, and nobility of character lift Him to serene heights far above fanaticism.

How did this Figure come into being? No matter what the exact date of each "Memoir" may turn out to be—and it is significant that all the critics, German and English, have been compelled to relinquish the late dates at first assigned to them, and push them back step by step into the first century *—it matters not what their exact dates may prove to be: the Figure they paint has still to be accounted for, and remains still as much the Miracle of history as ever.

Is He the dream-ideal of a generation

* Upon the question of dates and external testimony, readers must consult the specialists on the subject, *e.g.*, Lightfoot's *Essays on Supernatural Religion*, Westcott, Estlin Carpenter, Dale, &c.

of Jews? If Jewish fancy, working upon a few facts, had woven an ideal, it would not surely have created a poor, unpractical, un-Jewish enthusiast; much less one who perished on the scandalous cross, the shameful brand of Roman oppression.

The gods do not come down to earth, in the literature of the Jews, as they do in Gentile and Indian mythologies. The Unity of God had been burned into the Hebrew mind for centuries past; and, while they looked for an Emancipator, the idea of an Incarnation would never of itself enter into their wildest dreams. Such a "Son of God" was no development of Judaism; on the contrary, was deeply repugnant to it.

The artlessness of the portraits is remarkable. The "Three" do not use any cunning skill in licking their stories into identical shape. They are even careless of divergencies and variations. Any discrepancies detected are superficial

or immaterial, never touching the substance of the story. They are only the natural variations of different observers recounting the same events.

I have before me three photographs of a church which I have reason to know well. Only one of these three artists knew of the work of any other. The pictures are not identical. Two display no trees in front. In one of them no lecture hall behind is to be seen. In another, trees and window-arcading are specially prominent. Yet it is the same church in all. Nor is it possible that the three artists worked from a single original drawing in common, adding fancy touches according to their individual taste; for, not only do the variations harmonise with the common design, but even some of the variations are shared alike by two of the pictures. In the three photographs I observe the same stone-facings in the brickwork exactly at the same places; the same bands of darker tiles along the

roof; the same number of windows on the east side. Yet the point from which the views have been taken is obviously different in each instance.

In the foreground of two of the paintings of Jesus the miraculous birth is wanting. The ascension is absent from the end of another of them. But the bands of the Divine and human run along them all, alike harmoniously. The self-assertion and the humility; the purity and the large-heartedness; the sternness and the sympathy; the shadow and the light of the cross, the burden and the joy of it—all these are, broadly speaking, consistently united in each picture.

They take Him from different points of view, the first Jewish, the second Roman, the third Greek; but, in spite of differences, it is the same Figure in them all—the same Face by independent artists. How, then, came they into existence, if not taken from life?

As for the Fourth picture of that

Figure, it has a distinct character of its own. Perhaps a parallel to it may be found in a fourth photograph of the same church, which is different from the rest, because an interior view of the church.

The Fourth picture of Jesus seems not unlike the interior view of His mind and nature. The painter of it is said to have been His closest companion—a view that is being confirmed by further research—more capable than any other of penetrating into his Master's mind. It is the same lofty, humane, suffering Figure; but as if *seen from within.*

Were He a common man, or even a genius, four artists might attempt to paint the same ideal. But He is no mere local church like thousands more; rather is He unanimously felt to be the WORLD'S CATHEDRAL.

The sublimity of the picture of Christ does not lie in the artistic execution of the work. There is no trace of genius in

the workmanship of the Four. When they themselves act or speak or write in their own name, there is no flash of insight, nor any hint of a skilful manipulator. The narratives in themselves are simple chronicles. But whenever Jesus opens His lips, there come forth utterances, gleams of light, which captivate mankind, both learned and simple. There is nothing in the picture that is owing to the artistic skill of the painter: all its splendour appears to lie in its subject.

Bettany's little "Life of Darwin" begins: "He stands magnificently conspicuous as a genius of rare simplicity of soul, of unwearied patience, of unflinching devotion to truth, &c." Christ, on the contrary, owes nothing to the character-sketches and panegyrics of biographers. They never dilate on His superior qualities. Never at all do they analyse His character, except in the short Prologue to John. They simply *let Him act and speak*, and leave readers to receive their own impres-

sions. They are mere chroniclers, reporters. He breathes "palpitatingly" before the reader's eyes, a distinctly-marked, complete character. Yet there is more matter in to-day's *Times* than in their united Narratives!

The question of questions is: How did this Figure come into being? It *is*. And it *stays*.

John Stuart Mill avers that the disciples of Jesus could not have created the Figure, for His character is absolutely above the moral conceptions of His followers. Rousseau declares that the inventor of such a Being would be a more astonishing character than the hero. Theodore Parker says it would take a Jesus to create a Jesus. Eighteen centuries still leave Him Master of men's minds and hearts, something very like the World's Temple where "Spirit with spirit doth meet." Too high above the level of His followers to be the creation of their pious imagination, as one and all confess, was He not also

too high above His *age* for it to slowly dream Him in legends, having nothing but a Nazarene Sage to start with? If a *genius* could not create such a Character, could two generations of *common* minds evolve Him out of a Jewish Rabbi? Mill, Parker, Rousseau, could not conceive such a creation to be possible. Is it conceivable, if we allow, say, some sixty years for fishermen and tax-gatherers and tradition-bound Jewish peasants to evolve the unique Ideal? The world has not, up to the present, risen high enough even to exhaustively comprehend Him. He who "doubts well" will doubt whether the common thought of the first century was capable of transforming a Hebrew Sage into the transcendent Christ of the "Memoirs."

"Is there no corner safe from peeping Doubt?"
J. Russell Lowell.

IX

Watermarks in the Documents

Anachronisms as Watermarks—Political Changes reflected—Shakespeare's Brutuses—Tell-tale Terms—Tacitus—Hall-marks of Good History.

Recently a Paris fraud was detected by means of the watermark on the forged document. When held up against the light, the paper bore a date subsequent to the date set down by the forger's pen. When in 1883 Shapira brought to the British Museum his find of old Hebrew MSS. black with age, modestly asking one million sterling for the fifteen leathern slips that smelt of ancient spices, a few experts detected the swindle by analysing the scrip and proving that such stuff was of modern manufacture.

It ought to be possible to test the Christian writings in a somewhat similar

or parallel way. Not that any sane man now thinks them concoctions. But if it be true that the Gospels were not compiled till the second century, we ought to be able to catch the compilers tripping in their allusions and technical terms. Sir Walter Besant in one of his novels, where he pictures a past century, makes one of his characters speak, either of catching a train, or sending a "wire," or "posting" a letter! There are cases enough extant to prove that fictional or mythical stories, written long subsequent to the supposed events, especially when they introduce local history or provincial leaders, employ terms and titles not then in use, or reveal ignorance of local customs, or otherwise betray themselves by their anachronisms and misnomers.

This test can, as a matter of fact, be fairly applied to the *Memoirs* of Jesus, and the *Acts*. For Palestine was passing through political, social, and ecclesiastical changes almost as marked and swift as

those of the French Revolution. Even so good a historian as Tacitus was puzzled by the anomalies of that time. The Romans had come and were periodically altering the government of the country. There were Roman laws and Hebrew laws in force side by side; Roman officials and Hebrew officials; Roman terms and Hebrew terms; in fact, all the overlapping complications of a transitional time. All these changes had occurred and ended within forty years after the crucifixion, and Palestine had thus become Roman in its forms and methods for fifty years before the compilers are said by sceptics to have written the *Memoirs*. Might we not reasonably expect these writings to unwittingly disclose errors and anachronisms when dealing with such a distant and complicated period? Up to the light with them, then, and let us see their watermarks!—not with the desire of proving their infallibility, but of testing their general worth as genuine histories.

Within fifty years the form of government in Palestine was, according to Josephus, recast five times. It was:—

I.—A United Kingdom under a Native Ruler.

II.—Cut up into Principalities under Tetrarchs.

III.—Partly a Roman Province and partly under Tetrarchs.

IV.—Again a United Kingdom under Native Rulers.

V.—Completely subject to Rome, with nominal power in the Temple left to the Herodian family.

Any historian of a later generation, much more compilers of floating tales, might very easily get entangled in these fitful changes. Yet a careful scrutiny shews that all these changes are reflected in the *Memoirs* and *Acts*, reflected, too, without appreciable mistake, or even apparent effort after accuracy.

I.—At Christ's Advent, Herod the Great is sole ruler.

II.—A few months later he is dead, his dominions are divided among his sons, and Joseph with the Child flees from the proverbially cruel Archelaus.

III.—Then we find Judea a Roman Province, and Galilee, &c., under native Tetrarchs.

Thus within the first three chapters of "Matthew" and "Luke," these three changes are accurately alluded to: and yet these chapters of the Infancy are said by some to be the least historical.

IV.—A few years pass and Herod unites the kingdom again.

V.—And finally, in the Festus, Felix, &c., of the *Acts*, we find Rome ruling and Roman procurators administering her rule.

The form of government is single, dual, triple, irregular in turn, and all in the right order of succession. The very term "reigned" (*βασιλεύει*) applied to Archelaus by "Matthew" is a distinguishing mark of historic accuracy

Shakespeare mixes up the two Brutuses in his *Julius Cæsar*, representing Marcus instead of Decimus Brutus to have been Cæsar's favourite. Apparently our great dramatist was not strong in his Roman history. When he makes Anthony address the crowd in the Forum as "Friends, Romans, countrymen," he uses terms which no Roman orator could have dreamt of employing. Similarly, he betrays his modernness when Brutus calls the Senators "my lords" instead of "conscript fathers."

The New Testament apparently never falls into such errors. Pilate, for example, is only a *legatus*, and has no *quaestor* to accuse the Nazarene culprit—in harmony with *Roman Antiquities*. If he had held higher office, a scourging would have been effected by lictors; being only a *legatus*, his soldiers have to act the part of lictors for the nonce.

That Pilate's wife should be said to have been with him in Syria appears,

prima facie, to be an error. For Roman law—like the customary regulations for the captains of British steamships—forbade a wife to accompany a Roman magistrate abroad. We discover, however—Tacitus mentions the fact—that the law had recently been altered. Thus Pilate's wife, who failed to vindicate "this just Man" successfully at the time, comes forward now, so to speak, to attest the accuracy of the narrative and plead His cause. It may be remarked, too, that Pilate is the same type of character in Tacitus as in the *Gospels*. The latter are fair and just to him, picturing his vacillation, yet at the same time exhibiting his reluctance to sentence the innocent and his earnest stand for Roman justice. Other historians tell how he had massacred thousands of Jews, sustaining Luke in the assertion that he had "mingled the blood of certain Galileans with their sacrifices." It is the consequent terror of being reported to Rome which stings and

cripples him, when the wily Jews cry in his ears, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

One of the most palpable "Watermarks," because touching a matter so likely to be mis-stated, refers to the execution of John the Baptist. "Immediately the king sent an executioner," we read. The Greek word for "executioner" is derived from "speculator," a Latin technical term for the scouts attached to each legion and to the bodyguard of a general. That is to say, the executioner is said to have been a *military*, and not, as we should naturally have expected, a *civic* officer or "headsman." This would, legitimately enough, be pronounced to be a sign of the compiler's imperfect knowledge, were it not for Josephus, who tells us that at the time of the execution Herod was at war with Aretas, and accordingly the *military* officer, "speculator," was on the spot.*

* *Cf. Oxford House Papers*, II., 144.

Marks of the strange co-existence of Roman and Hebrew laws appear at every stage in the story. Rome orders the "taxing," but the Jewish custom of registration still survives, and accordingly Joseph and Mary go up to be registered at their ancestral city. Two taxes are in force: tribute to Cæsar, termed *census;* and the Temple tax, the didrachma.* A *Levitical* guard follows Judas to arrest Jesus; but they are *Roman* soldiers who stand sentinel by His tomb. It is blasphemy for which the Jews would kill Him, but they have not any longer the power of life and death. The Roman judge alone can take life; and, to have a footing before him, the charge is made a political one. The Jews would have executed Him by stoning; the Romans do

* *Cf.* Hoole's *Classics in the New Testament* and Maclear's *Historical Illustrations.* It is not needful to recall the supposed mistake concerning the date when Quirinus was Governor of Syria, and to rehearse the now familiar facts which have come to light to explain it.—*See* SCHÜRER and RAMSAY.

so by crucifixion. The watches that are kept are by Jewish reckoning three; by Roman, four; and in this, again, the *Memoirs* accurately reflect the different methods of reckoning in vogue.

"Words are fossil history: they are the marks and vestiges of great revolutions," says Trench. The *Memoirs* stand this test. Roman military terms: as "centurion," "legion"; Roman coins: "denarius," "quadrans"; Hebrew terms: "corban," "raca," &c.—all are accurate. Before the destruction of Jerusalem "Jews" had a national, political sense, reflected in the Synoptists; after 70 A.D., when the nation broke up, no longer a national but a "Judaistic," anti-Christian sense, as found in John.

And in the midst of all these swift changes in government and phraseology, among all these pitfalls awaiting the romancer or late writer, there occurs scarcely a single anachronism, or definite mistake. Is it thus that half-legendary

stories or fond tales go to work? These writings—can they be the slow growth of superstitious and unhistorical generations, compiled long after the events, and yet be such *good history*, comprising endless details in dates, facts, and references, and all standing the test of the most scholarly criticism of later centuries? Men who say so have forgotten how unthinkingly fond dreams and growths and legends soar far above prosaic topography, political history, and intricate *Antiquities* and archæology.

The "Watermarks" are there, and are scarcely disputable.

"*Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action.*"

CARLYLE.

X

The Personal Verification of Christ

Failure of Argument—Heart's Insight—Body and Soul of Christianity—"Live the Life"—Charles Lamb—T. H. Green—The "Word"—Soul-sense—A Cathedral Window—Solvitur Ambulando—Ruskin—Coleridge—Christ as a Personal Power—A Map.

DOUBTING CASTLE is perhaps seldom taken by the battering ram of argument, by the heavy guns of historic facts and documentary evidence. These are too much like blows in the face to convince the mind. They do not quite appeal to the faculty in man which is qualified to perceive the spiritual and divine. They may assist in clearing away obstacles over which the intellect stumbles. But on the other hand, if they claim excessive attention, they may detain the heart from penetrating to inner spiritualities, may divert the eye

from the profounder factors in the case. They plant the dispute on ground where criticism can fight for ever. At best they only settle outward events. Granted that it is important work to deal with these outward proofs. After all, the ultimate doubt is in most cases too subtle and too deeply set in the citadel of the heart to be defeated by the rude implements of external assault.

Æsop's familiar fable has here its fulfilment. The furious north wind makes the traveller draw his cloak round him the more tightly; the sun makes him cast it off by merely beating down its warmth upon him. The argumentative method, driving its historical and documentary evidence upon the doubter, is apt to make the brave man wrap his disbelief the more closely about his heart. Perhaps Christ has more subtle ways of inducing a man to cast off his disbelief, namely, by the penetrating appeal of His own radiance and warmth, by the influence of per-

sonality and love. What does Paracelsus say?—

> "Watch narrowly
> The demonstration of a truth, its birth,
> And you trace back the effluence to its spring
> And source within us, where broods radiance vast,
> To be elicited ray by ray."

One is beset here by the risk and fear of cant, in urging the personal "demonstration of a truth." Yet it would be a nameless pity if, because of this risk and fear, one should miss what is perhaps the very essence of the case for Christ.

I say, the very essence of Christ's case. The object in view is not merely to gain credence for external events, dates, and compositions. That a certain human body once arose from a grave in "a lone Syrian town"—of what value is it merely to credit the reported event? That a certain demon-driven lunatic was healed long centuries ago in Judea — what does it matter if I admit the statement of fact? The real worth of such historic events lies

in the moral truth which they convey to one's mind. The Resurrection has virtue for us only in so far as, by its aid, we perceive the deathless life of the spiritual Son of God, and find, rendered vivid and actual, the survival and eternal life of the good. Does not the Birth at Bethlehem express, as its essential truth, the descent of the Great and Holy Spirit among men, and set forth, in visible human embodiment, the entrance of His saving power?

A man may not be able to give intellectual credence to the material facts stated, or, what is often taken to be the same thing, may not be able to imagine them. Yet he may perceive the moral contents, the spiritual truths which these outward events are supposed to carry. If so, he appears to have the essence of faith, is not an unbeliever. He may in similar fashion perceive by the direct glance of the soul the main range of truths which Christianity comes to deliver—the Father-Spirit; the beauty, goodness, and love of

that Spirit; the redemptive, healing presence of that Spirit, supremely and incomparably present in Jesus; the character of Christ as the divinest term or symbol of the unseen Father. If these are perceived by his spiritual sight, if these truths have received radiance and force from the life and person of Jesus, he, I would dare to believe, has the *soul* of faith, even though he doubt the external facts which are supposed to be the body and vehicle of these truths.

In saying this, one does not give away the external facts and events as useless. They—it is matter of history—have been the means of graving these spiritual truths deep in the minds of men. They have been the body in which the soul of Christian truth has grown and developed to mature strength. Some seem to imagine that the soul of truth can exist in unvarying definiteness without a body of historic fact, without an embodiment, a witness, a type of the truth. Tennyson evidently

felt the difficulty and even the improbability of retaining spiritual truth apart from an embodiment or type of it.

"Leave thou thy sister when she prays,
Her early heaven, her happy views,
Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse
A life that leads melodious days.

Her faith thro' form is pure as thine,
Her hands are quicker unto good:
Oh, sacred be the flesh and blood
To which she links a truth divine!

See thou, that countest reason ripe
In holding by the law within,
Thou fail not in a world of sin,
And even for want of such a type."

If the "type," or historic embodiment of Christian truth were removed from the general mind, it seems almost a certainty that in course of time the soul of Christian truth would fade into dimness, flicker fitfully, and perhaps vanish altogether. Is not this vanishing tendency visible in many quarters at the present time? Any one who watches contemporary currents of thought must observe that

most of the men who lose faith in the historic events of Christianity tend to drift towards agnosticism and pessimism. It is difficult to retain hold of a *disembodied* soul of Christianity. The historic Christ of the Gospels, it cannot well be denied, adds immense strength and security to the sense of love over-arching humanity, to the perception of lasting worth in life, to faith in the reconciliation and the immortality of the human spirit. Apart from Christ, this faith seems insecure and disposed to disappear. It does not always disappear in the individual instance, but tends to do so always in the course of a generation or two, when, as shewn in a previous discussion, it has had time to work out its issues.

If, however, an individual can believe the essential contents of Christianity from purely spiritual evidence—then the ultimate end is attained. In any and every case, what is required is inward perception of the divinely good and divinely

reconciling in Christ, and personal devotion thereto.

It may be well for minds baffled with problems of ancient history to relinquish the exhausting inquiry and, without positively pronouncing upon the historicity of the fully-developed story, yield their hearts to the spiritual impulse of the captivating Ideal and unique Life. Could they not suffer Christ thus far—submit their minds to be filled with His sense of God and His lofty conceptions of the Father, and lay open their spirits to be charged with His spiritual intuitions and quickened with His spiritual sensibilities? They should place their hearts under His direct spell, so as to receive His spiritual endowment. And if they come thereby to think of goodness, beauty, truth and love as at their divinest in Jesus, and if they are thus baptised with a humble sense of God and inspiration for a Christly life, have they not received much of the essence of what He desired for His disciples? This

direct, personal sense of divine perfections and grace is the true recognition of the essence of Divinity.

Charles Lamb—the old and well-attested story goes—was telling what he should do if the world's greatest men suddenly came into the room. Among others Shakespeare was named. "Ah, we should all rise and uncover if Shakespeare came in." "And Christ?" With a hushed voice, he stuttered out, "You see, we should all kneel." Is not this "kneeling" of earnest hearts in the presence of Jesus—in whom every knee shall bow—a deeper tribute of honour than even high theological dogmas regarding His mysterious rank?

Professor T. H. Green says, "To most of us it is under the name of Christ that all thoughts of God have come since we were capable of them. God, so to speak, has been incarnate to us, has died and risen again for us in the person of Jesus, ever since there has been a God at all." Thought, he adds, first becomes definite

in language; and Christ is language to express and define God to our minds. Is not this, then, just the "Word" of St. John's Gospel? And is not Green and every man who finds Christ to be the language and expression of God a true believer in the essential Divinity of Christ?

Even while unable to define and dogmatise, one may yet find in Christ one's highest thought of God, one's loftiest idea of the Divine character, and may thus be best able to worship the Unseen in terms of Christ. One may become so touched by the spiritual spell of Christ Himself and so linked with Him in the moral experiences and mental conflicts and daily troubles of life as to be caught in the field of His spiritual magnetism. One may find oneself unconsciously learning humility, trust, and human kindness in Christ's school, and may thus, by immediate insight and personal confidence, get the essential moral virtue of that which is expressed in set terms in creeds. And

this direct relation which may sometimes exist "in honest doubt," has, as Tennyson avers, more true faith in it than is often to be found in half the creeds. Not because the creeds need be mistaken, but because they are often held outside a man's heart, have not been born again in his soul's convictions.

Faith, in fact, as is said by the anonymous author of two tender and farseeing little books,* "is a peculiar taste, a trust, an aspiration, a love, even more than a *quod erat demonstrandum*." "The sort of belief which religion requires is one which is immediate, very vivid, very moving to the affections, and very influential upon action"; and a man may, without taking the circuitous method of historical research and complicated proofs, have a very potent, very saving faith in the Son of Man by direct attachment.

* "If the Gospel narratives are mythical—what then?" (1868), and "But how if the Gospels are Historic?" (1891). Published by Douglas, Edinburgh.

"We needs must love the highest when we see it." We assent to the statement that the Sun is much larger, though much farther away, than the Moon. When the distances are given in miles, our minds credit the accuracy of the figures. But the relative importance to us of the two orbs does not depend upon our ability to go through all the processes of the mathematical proof. The *felt* warmth of the sun and the radiance of its light act on our sense of its importance for human life without the aid of mathematics and astronomy. Somewhat similar is the direct moral effect of Jesus upon honest hearts. It is by this swift way that the peasant perceives the truth in the Christian faith. And the intellectual doubter, after wearing his brain to weariness in prolonged study, may by the same way find satisfaction for his heart in the spiritual Jesus, may receive healing "virtue" from the light and warmth that play around the person of Christ.

To resume our metaphor, a book upon astronomy, studied underground, would not verify the sun's existence, except to the mathematical faculty as an *idea*. Its light and heat above-ground are its direct verification to us. It is possible to discuss Christ as a mere concept, or as a problem of ancient history. The vital relation to Him is that in which the heart feels the charm and light of His personality and life, and the power of His Cross.

> "The highest, holiest manhood Thou;
> Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

A miracle or physical feat could not make the eye of the soul perceive "the light that never was on sea or land," the moral fascination of Christ, *except* in so far as that physical wonder was a blaze of that light, a symbol or example of that fascination. God is not bent upon convincing us merely that certain histories are not spurious, and that certain physical changes occurred in Palestine. The histories are

means to an end—that end, the sense of the Divine, and personal response of heart to its mercy and power. "I know Christ," says Browning, "by the direct glance of the soul's seeing, as the eye sees light."

This was the very response which Jesus desired and commended. The woman who touched the hem of His garment—had she a correct notion of the "Divinity" and other kindred doctrines? A true faith she had, namely, a direct sense of the surpassing goodness and power that filled Him.

"Throughout the Fourth Gospel," says Green, "we find the true or highest faith represented as that by which a purely spiritual act takes Christ as the manifestation of God into the soul without waiting for conviction by visible signs."

Even more is Christianity a *life*, a spirit and method of living, and it is satisfactorily verified only when it is lived.

If it were nothing more than a question

of science or a problem of ancient history, absolutely everything would depend upon documents, dates, authors, evidence. In a sense it is true that Christianity stands or falls with the "Memoirs," for it is not a system of thought and ethics, but a Person and the discovery of a Life. But, to go deeper still, Christianity is not so much a history as it is a type of life, a secret of character and conduct, a spiritual force directed towards the fulfilment of such a life. Clearly, then, to be tested it must be lived. The secret of character must be tried in practice. It is more an art than a science, and the art cannot be finally estimated by the dry light of intellect alone. This is true to some extent of all religions, but peculiarly true of Christianity, since its "inwardness" is so exceptionally deep and characteristic.

A cathedral window cannot be appreciated from the outside. It must be studied from within if its design and colouring are to be fully enjoyed. An

outside critic of Christianity is placed at a certain disadvantage. The physical structure he is entitled to discuss, but there is something more in it, the something for which the very structure was reared, which can be estimated by those who know the interior glow and animating spirit of it. This looks, perhaps, like begging the whole question; but is it?

The "Professor at the Breakfast Table" presents a fine caricature and counterfeit of this claim. "If I, the Professor, will only give in to the Muggletonian doctrine, there shall be no question through all that sect that I am competent to judge of that doctrine; nay, I shall be quoted as evidence of its truth while I live, and cited, after I am dead, as testimony on its behalf; but if I utter any ever-so-slight Anti-Muggletonian sentiment, then I become incompetent to form any opinion on the matter." We must take warning, and not merit such pleasant pommelling as this. On the contrary, however, we

accept the adverse testimony as valid if it come from men who have sincerely studied Christianity from the inside, sought its spirit, and tried its way of living.

There are truths which can be proved only by trial, by personal, cordial application in life, and by full experience. And while the outside critic is in a position to sit in judgment upon certain parts of the whole, no one can receive decisive verification of it without personally being a disciple of Christ. Take it as a working hypothesis, and try it. "Solvitur ambulando."

One must not postpone living the life until all doubts are settled. Rather, doubts will settle as one lives the life. Gareth is urged to

> "Stay till the cloud that settles round his birth
> Hath lifted but a little."

But Gareth, and all the Knights of the Round Table, solve the doubt by living with Arthur, and "working out his will to cleanse the world." He who is wishful

to do Christ's will shall penetrate His teaching. Truths rise to greet us as we travel the way of Christ's life.

Ruskin, before the later days of decay, said: "There is but one chance of life in admitting so far the possibility of the Christian verity as to try it on its own terms. There is not the slightest possibility of finding whether it be true or not at first. 'Show me a sign first, and I will come,' you say. 'No,' answers God, 'come first, and then you will see a sign.'" The rationale of this requirement is that the true sign which God gives to sincere hearts is not an outward, but an inward, spiritual witness, and that witness is given in experience and not in speculation.

Not that critics can coldly *experiment* with Christianity, while yet captious about it. From the very nature of the case, God's gleams of light are not given to unbelieving experimenters. Perhaps this demand calls to mind what the Spiritualists and Theosophists say—that the

spirits and psychic powers will not give any evidence to those who are without faith. But the case is quite different in Christianity, which is not merely a matter of credence, withholding its evidence from those who cannot credit all in advance. Rather, it is a spiritual *life*, and as a *life* it cannot be verified by the man who does not *live* it. And no one can expect to *experiment* in that life by critically and captiously dabbling in it. The personal test must be sincere.

"Try it," says Coleridge. "Do not talk to me of the evidences of Christianity: try it. It has been eighteen hundred years in existence, and has one individual left a record like the following: 'I have given Christianity a fair trial. I was aware that its promises were made only conditionally; but both outwardly and in the discipline of my inward acts and affections, I have performed the duties which it enjoins. Yet my assurance of its truth has received no increase. Its

promises have not been fulfilled, and I repent me of my delusion.' If neither your own experience nor the history of almost two thousand years has presented a single testimony to this purport, is it bigotry if I fear that the Unbelief which prejudges and prevents the experiment has its source elsewhere than in the uncorrupted judgment; that not the strong free mind, but the enslaved will, is the true original infidel in this instance."

Christ is a Power, as palpable and verifiable as the power of steam. There is endless evidence of the fact. He is the strongest spiritual Power among men today. There is a cloud of witnesses to the truth that His spiritual force makes bad men good. His influence is joined with the greatest moral miracles that one can discover. The personal power which every man feels in Christ—surely that is decisive evidence that He is true and from God. Difficulties upon historical questions should not be allowed to overwhelm the

testimony of experience, the experience not of one but of a multitude that no man can number.

Men of letters as well as religious teachers bear witness to this spiritual Power as a Christian *birth* in the heart. Sir Walter Scott, Michael Faraday, Carlyle in his "Everlasting Yea," Richard Jefferies after his years of sceptical pessimism, and others of equal standing, who probably had "cleared their minds of cant" and were not likely to be deceived, assured the world of a something, a *tang* of new life within, the entrance of a new consciousness of the Divine, the birth of a better self. And in the vast majority of cases, this new sense of life has arisen under the influence of Jesus.

It is proved to be a reality of life, not always happening in the style approved at the "Know-all Chapels," often rather coming as the bursting of a bud under spring heat and rain. That which is seen in Christ as light may become *energy*,

overcoming the resistance of an evil inertia by a spiritual power, a "power unto salvation."

The sense of estrangement from the Everlasting Good, the leaden load of conscious wrong, the wants and failures of the spirit within, hail Jesus with eager feelings. The sorest fact in one's life, by us called "sin," is not to be ignored as if it were the mere *patois* of preachers. It is the utterance of the universal human conscience. No view of life, no estimate of Christianity, can be adequate and true which leaves this large factor out of account. And when the heart's distempers and disorders are most felt, then Christ is best verified, for then is realised the chief moral need which gives Him His supreme value to the heart.

Here is a map of Japan. In 1880 it is flat, coloured, a thing of lines and tints on paper. In 1890, the same map is transformed to me. It has become a living country of mountain and flood, having

been seen and traversed in the meanwhile. These lines on paper start up a hundred visions. What meets the eye of an untravelled friend beside me as he looks at the map, and what meets my eye, are two different things. That shifting panorama of a thousand islets capped with green and set in winding vistas of water is to him only a name—the "Inland Sea." That Tokaido, or highway, busy with travellers and pilgrims is to him only a line upon a superficies. Experience transforms the paper map into a varied and lovely land.

"Read my little fable." To the outside critic Christianity is one thing, a thing of dates and philosophies and history, all on paper. To notable knights of Christian service such as Charles Kingsley and Catherine Booth, as well as to the humblest disciples, it lives with vital throb, and bears the colour and warmth of reality. The headland and dangerous coasts of temptation, the inland gems of truth set calm and deep in a perfect life, the giant

personality, like the sacred mountain Fuji-Yama, grasping and commanding the land at its base and rising into touch with the skies, the highway of obedience and service —they are not ancient designs on paper, but facts of present life and of vivid experience.

The battle of Criticism is great. The battle of the Heart is greater. But greatest and sorest of all is the battle of the Will. Study may sway one's understanding, and yet leave one's will lying sluggish, held stationary by its own inertia. It is but poor gain to give one's assent to the case for Christianity, if one does not bend one's will and heart devoutly to the life of a Christian.

Principal Shairp, who took all literature for his province, saw also this secret of life :—

> I have a life with Christ to live;
> But, ere I live it, must I wait
> Till learning can clear answer give
> Of this and that book's date?

I have a life in Christ to live,
 I have a death in Christ to die;
And must I wait till Science give
 All doubts a full reply?

Nay, rather while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
 Questioning of life and death and sin,
 Let me but creep within
Thy fold, O Christ, and at Thy feet
Take but the lowest seat,
And hear Thine awful voice repeat,
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet:
 "Come unto Me and rest;
 Believe Me and be blest."

"Slowly the Bible of the race is writ;
Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it."
J. Russell Lowell.

XI

Strange Things in the Old Testament.

Medley of Mixed Morals—Historical Perspective—Religious Education of a Race—Mahomet—Accommodation to Child-race—"Winked-at"—Fossils in the History—Remnants of Barbarism—"Thus saith the Lord"—Providence—Seers—The Ascent to Christ.

It is not the Higher Criticism, with its theories of the composition of the Pentateuch and Isaiah, that disturbs the mind of the "secular man." It is the Old Testament itself as it stands, the strange medley of its contents—religious truth side by side with slaughters and immoralities, half-barbaric characters and anthropomorphic ideas of God. How can one quell mutinous amazement at the presence of such features in a book of Divine revelation?

All that can be said in reply will leave many difficulties unexplained.

I. These Hebrew Scriptures must first be set in historical perspective. Their chief characters, from Moses onwards, stood as far apart as Augustine, King Alfred, Cromwell and Wesley. These Old Testament writings range themselves along receding centuries, and it is when placed in this historical perspective that some of the perplexing contents become capable of a rational explanation.

The revelation of God and truth was produced in the course of these centuries of history. Some have been accustomed to imagine it springing forth full-grown as Minerva sprang from the brain of Jupiter, just as they have thought of the earth being created by God perfect and finished at a stroke. We now know that the revelation was first wrought out in history—in primitive man, in the great "pilgrim father" and his descendants, in a Semitic race and its leaders.

We see that race, generation after generation, being educated, preparatory

to the "far-off divine event to which the whole creation moved." It constantly betrays a backward gravitation, a reversion to the idolatrous type among the nations around. This backward tendency, however, is slowly overborne by "a Power, not themselves, that makes for righteousness."

The history is set in a religious light, penetrated by religious ideas. Truth and error are presented in conflict along the course of events. God's character is disclosed, His laws for human life are made to appear, in the experience of individuals, in "signs and wonders," in institutions social and religious, through pioneers of faith—men "born out of due time," ahead of their age—through legislators, prophets, poets and moralists, who are "moved" of God in diverse ways and degrees.

Modern criticism is showing to-day that, like the revelation itself, the literature of it grew by accretion. The

Scriptures arose as the providentially-directed record of the process and the products of revelation. What though inaccuracies and discrepancies of a minor kind may be found among the composite narratives? The Scripture, that is, the Writing or Record of the whole, is so divinely ordered as to give to us an adequate presentation of the revelation and the deposit of truth.*

God's object in these Sacred Writings is not to supply us with infallibly correct information about the numbers slain in an ancient battle or about the price, variously stated, of Araunah's threshing-floor. It is not at all vital that we should know what exactly took place on the summit of Mount Sinai, or at the destruction of Sennacherib's army. The Divine value of the Book does not lie in the details of its history, but in its total religious and ethical teaching. Many

* Cf Newman Smyth's *Old Faiths in New Light*, and Gladden's *Who Wrote the Bible?*

who are unable to say how far it is inspired may at any rate feel the Divine power with which much of it is charged, and perceive its religious light and its lessons for life.

"It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer.
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?"

One might, perhaps, expect that God would give His truth to men in full and complete form, without admixture of human and imperfect elements, and without the necessity of corrections and additions to perfect it. But such is not God's method. Such a Revelation, final and descending foursquare out of heaven, like Mahomet's coffin, would have been a foreign, impossible religion for half-civilised races, as unsuitable to them as *Sartor Resartus* to a schoolboy labouring at his "First Reader," or as Wagner's music to Kaffirs. A full "Body of

Divinity" would have failed to serve the half-formed minds of the tent-peoples of the desert. As well give the "Code Napoleon" or the "British Constitution" to roving tribes of Patagonians. What God reveals to a race must be adapted to the moral and mental stage of development to which the race has attained.

2. Then it is to be noted that *God teaches and trains imperfect races, as parents teach young children, by accommodation.*

That is to say, not only does He use kinder-garten rites, and allegories suited to the undeveloped mind, things which are left behind when maturity is reached, but He gives us, as Frederic Myers says, "temporary permission and sanction to existing modes of thought and feeling with regard to religious truth and duty which were not merely inadequate but partially untrue, and which it was in-

tended subsequently to supersede by fuller revelations."

Just as we leave our child to entertain his crude notions of God and heaven, because these are the nearest thing to the truth which he is capable of understanding in his childhood, and just as we allow certain things in a child which we shall correct by-and-by in the fitting time, so God seems to permit in the training of the child-races such things as slavery, polygamy, witch-killing, asceticism, and animal sacrifice.

This was just the view which Jesus Christ took of the imperfect institutions of the Old Testament. When someone quoted against Him the Mosaic regulations about divorce—namely, that before putting away a wife and marrying another the husband must give her a document, a bill of divorcement—Christ replied that such a regulation was given to their fathers "because of the hardness of their hearts." It was allowed to the half-civilised ages,

but could no longer be "winked-at." Now, Christ says, you must not put away your wife at all except for the one sin of unfaithfulness. It will be adultery in you who have fuller light, though to the ruder ancients it was temporarily permitted.

But God, while permitting such things, is steadily teaching His child-races larger, higher things. He seemed to sanction slavery; but slavery existed in oppressive form in the countries around the Hebrews; and what the Mosaic Law did was to regulate the institution and ameliorate its effects, namely, by establishing the year of Jubilee, when domestic slaves were set free.

Similarly, in the case of marriage, divorce was common in the countries around, and wives were put away at the caprice or momentary irritation of husbands, and were allowed no rights or recognition. The Mosaic Law restrained the facility of such divorce, and held the

caprice of husbands in check by compelling them to go through certain formalities before effecting the separation.

Or again, the sacrifice of cattle and sheep was sanctioned, but special care was taken that the offering of human beings in sacrifice, so customary elsewhere around, should not be practised by the Jews. When the founder of the race, Abraham, was impelled by his strong religious instincts to offer his very dearest to God, God intercepted him, and for all succeeding time in Palestine, by one grand object-lesson, prohibited and stopped human sacrifice. No fire of Moloch blazed with human beings in Palestine.

All through the Old Testament, and even in the New, we discover the law of accommodation; but always the permission is temporary; restrictions are imposed, partial steps taken in the right direction, until, when God's full training of His people is completed under Christ, the partial and imperfect are done away.

3. In these Sacred Writings we may naturally expect to find a record of the crude notions and imperfect morals to which the race had attained.

We find, not only witchcraft, slavery, and polygamy, but also ruthless atrocities in war, the slaughter of families for the sins of their heads, and other items which revolt all that is Christly in us. God is represented as smelling burnt-meat, as impelling David to take a census and then punishing him for taking it. Noah lies in a drunken, shameless stupor. Abraham in Egypt passes off his wife as his sister. Samson, David, and Solomon fall into gross sins of the flesh.*

These Hebrew characters, even those who are chosen agents of God, are not put forward as ideals, but as pupils of the

* Of these cases, some are lapses on the part of men who on the whole are earnest and devout. Many of the deplorable deeds are forthwith condemned. Things are not justified by simply being reported. The Book is candid, and true to human life.

Spirit. And the errors and deficiencies of the pupils appear in the story of the process through which the Divine Educator teaches them.

Then we read of merciless massacres perpetrated by the chosen people in the name of their God. For example, in the last three chapters of *Judges* we find a man, whose concubine has been maltreated unto death by wicked members of the tribe of Benjamin, dividing her body into twelve pieces and sending a piece to each of the tribes as a call to war and vengeance. In the ruthless slaughter that follows, the warriors of the eleven tribes are said to have put to death 25,000 of the Benjamites, pursuing their bloody work till only 600 were left. And all is done in the name of their God, and after repeated religious exercises. Thereupon follows an account of the rape of 400 maidens from Jabesh-Gilead.

Or again, in 1 *Sam.* xv., we are told how Samuel the prophet bade Saul "Go

and smite Amelek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

If that were done by the Turks, we should call it barbaric butchery; and we shall not soften our language about it simply because the event is recorded in these Hebrew histories.

What are we to say of passages and incidents such as these? These are the things that infidel lecturers expose to scorn as parts of an inspired Bible.

The evident explanation is that these judges and warriors of early Hebrew history were half-barbarous, half-civilised: were only half-enlightened and still retained the rude notions of morality and humanity to which the age had attained. God was slowly through the centuries educating them and revealing higher laws and truths to them (as we shall see immediately), but meanwhile the record of their history and training contains a re-

morselessly true rehearsal of their habits and morals, cruelties and corruptions.

In short, these remnants of half-civilised life are in the Divine evolution of religion and ethics what the fossils are in the stratified rocks which underlie our green earth. Christ's revelation and life are none the less brilliant because of the fossils and "faults" to be found in the layers of Hebrew history above which He rises into Divine grandeur.

In reprobating these deeds of destruction we are taking the ethical standard that Christ has created in us, and are making it a test for the conduct of primitive races. Morality, however, is never absolute, is ever relative, to-day as of yore. We must estimate the practice of devout men in that ancient age by the ideas current at the time.

A difficulty still remains, however. Are not these painful and cruel things usually attributed to orders given by God? Did not God enjoin upon the Israelites the war

for the total extermination of the Canaanites? Is it not God who bids the eleven tribes slaughter the 25,000 Benjamites? Are not many of these incidents introduced with a "Thus saith the Lord," or "The Lord spake unto His servant and said"?

To the vivid, unscientific thought of a people who knew nothing of "secondary causes" and "laws of Nature," almost everything was of God's doing. As it was He "who watered the hills from His chambers," so it was He who "hardened Pharaoh's heart." God is quoted as saying to David, "I gave thee thy master's wives into thy bosom." Whatever occurred in the course of what we call "Providence," or arose from the operation of what is known to us as moral or natural law, even things that God merely *permitted*, were ascribed directly to God. This principle explains many cases in which the Divine name is quoted.

Some of the severities that offend our finer Christian sense were the means of

executing a kind of rude justice upon contemporary errors and corruptions. Nebuchadnezzar was "My servant," as also was Cyrus. The Assyrians were a providential agency in the development of the Israelites in coming to carry them away into exile. Plague, flood, and conquest served a purpose of judgment. And whatever served such a purpose, even those terrible deeds (as, later, in the case of the Crucifixion) that were overruled to serve Divine ends, were linked with the name of God.

But, indeed, does every "Thus saith the Lord" really mean that God supernaturally communicated express orders on the subject? Consider whether God communicated all the details, the minutiæ of the Levitical regulations about ceremonial cleanness and leprosy and cattle and matters of sanitation; whether, when it is said that God taught Bezaleel and Aholiab their handicrafts, we are to imagine a miracle in the workshop; whether, when we read "Jehovah hath put

a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets," we are to take it literally; whether, in the countless passages where Ezekiel and Jeremiah and other prophets say "Thus saith the Lord," they had had a miraculous communication.

Does not half the difficulty arise from the mistaken idea that God's message could only be conveyed vocally, as from outside the individual? God as a Spirit has more spiritual and less mechanical avenues to the minds of His servants than the tympanum and the auditory canal.

The Divine communication came usually through the highest faculties of the receptive mind; not operating, as was supposed of the Greek μάντις, through a passive, unintelligent medium, but vivifying his finest sensibilities. Without attempting an adequate definition, I conceive inspiration to be a Divine illumining, elevating, intensifying of the spirit of the prophet to such a degree that he receives gleams of the Divine mind and of truth beyond

the common ken, has *insight into moral conditions, and therefore foresight of their moral issues.* We should not borrow our metaphor from the pigeon who is said to have whispered the Koran into Mahomet's ear. We should rather think of the electric current passing through a thread of carbon and making it luminous.

This bears upon the strange things that came from God's prophets. Divine impulses are limited by the limitations of the receiver. The human medium gives shape and colour to the message. Given a man's conscience clear and true: his interpretation of his duty is even then affected by his judgment and enlightenment. Similarly, given a Divine impulse moving a susceptible spirit: his interpretation of the Divine will is conditioned by the limitations of his enlightenment, to some extent by the ideas in which he has been trained. The religious impulse that made Jephthah slay his daughter to fulfil his vow would make a Quaker spare life as more sacred

than a vow. "Thus saith the Lord" prefaces many utterances that are on a level far below the full height of the Divine mind as expressed by Christ.

"Thus saith the Lord," as one may see from the frequent repetition of the phrase in the prophecies, was the usual formula with which the prophet introduced the burning messages which sprang from the heart that was "moved" by Divine impulse. A somewhat similar phrase is used by St. Paul to preface some of his solemn utterances.

When slaughters and other strange things in the Old Testament are attributed to God's orders through His prophets, we are to understand that these spokesmen, when "moved" as they waited upon God, gave interpretations of Heaven's will which were limited by the imperfections of their judgment and by the thought of the time.

4. Hence we are led to the one great principle under which all this falls. *The*

Revelation of God and of God's truth and laws is progressive, and advances as the race advances in moral education, grows brighter as their spiritual powers are enlarged. The Revelation keeps step with the gradual rise of the race: is the spiritual power that raises it, and at the same time the register of its level. These Old Testament histories are the record of Jews' mistakes as well as of their religious institutions and aspirations. The crude, imperfect things found in the Record are not set down as pronouncements of God *for us*, while yet instructive. Rather, the Record shows us how God gradually eradicated the false and crude, and finally gave the full-orbed truth. At first, the Revelation was but as the dim streaks of day-dawn. The light grew as the generations rose; and what we see is the shining light shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Taking a large sweep of survey, we see development from the simple to the complex, from the primitive to the mature.

The idea of God is enlarged and enriched. He is Creator-Spirit, the Absolute (Jehovah), the King. Then we mark how in the Psalms and Prophecies the Maker and the God of Battles grows to be the God of mercy, and becomes rich in many-coloured attributes of perfection. Similarly, the hope of immortality, scarcely felt at first, emerges into distinct shape in the sorrows of exile.

To Abraham is revealed the sacredness of human life and the power of faith. To Moses is disclosed the moral basis of man's social and civic life, and the law of sacrifice in all divine service. In the Psalms, true sacrifice is made spiritual—"a broken and a contrite heart." To Isaiah is given the vision of the Servant of God, the Messiah, as the merciful Saviour, suffering and dying for the people in order to save and lift them up for ever.

Then the Great Sun of Righteousness leaps up above the horizon, and lo! it is day, the day of the Son of Man!

XII

Are All the Books Equally Inspired?

Catholicity of Scripture—Infallibility *v.* Life—Euclid—Degrees of Inspiration—War-annals *v.* Psalms—The Appeal to Christ—Bible Sceptics—A Hebrew Gallery—The Touchstone.

THE preceding chapter has dealt mainly with the Historical books of the Old Testament. The present chapter must set the other books alongside these, and measure their relative spiritual contents.

1. One observes, at the first glance, how catholic is the literature of the Bible, and in what varied types of human composition God gives the record of His teaching and revelation. Poetry He uses as well as prose, prophecy as well as history and biography. Here are five distinctively Poetical books, namely, Job (except the Prologue), Psalms, Proverbs,

Song of Songs, and Lamentations. Frequently the Prophets, too, rise as Spirit-filled seers to such lofty ranges of rhythmic prose as to touch the elevated level of essential poetry. In the Historical books, too, there are some short poems, such as the Triumph Songs of Miriam, of Joshua and of Deborah. It may be worth while to mention here, in passing, that the story which represents Joshua as calling upon the sun to stand still in Gibeon would not have distressed and baffled so many minds, if they had known—what every reader of the Revised Version now sees—that the account is a Hebrew poem, a quotation from a book of songs called "The Book of Jasher." When a poet challenges sun and moon and hills and seas to join in his jubilation, you do not tie him down to the matter-of-fact limitations of prose.

Now poetry may be as rich a means of Divine illumination and revelation as prose. Often, indeed, it is the poet who

is the true seer, piercing to the soul of things. History builds the external scaffolding and walls; inspirations of the Spirit fill the structure with poetic visions and outgoings of the soul.

God employs almost all the known types of human composition in His Scriptures. One book—namely, Job—is a drama, with two scenes set in Heaven, in which the Accuser and the Almighty converse, and with scene after scene showing us Job's sorrows and comforters and controversies. Another Book is a dramatic poem, namely, the Song of Songs, commonly called the Song of Solomon. Another is a collection of wise sayings, acute maxims —the Book of Proverbs. Another is a Hymnal, the "Book of Praise," of the Temple. In Ruth we have a charming little idyllic tale; while in Esther we have a tragic story of one lonely woman's patriotism.

Every department of human life, every form of composition, is represented. Not

only is pure religion taught, but national ethics, patriotism (in Esther), pure and faithful love (in Song of Songs), ethical philosohy (in Job and Ecclesiastes), combine to form the whole. By its catholicity the Bible touches and claims man's life upon all its many sides.

2. Now, *are all these Books of the Bible equally inspired?*

It is as difficult to define what inspiration is as to define what *life* is. But we may know that a body is inspired with life while unable to define that life. Thus much, however, we have seen pretty clearly—that inspiration does not mean the Divine dictation of the sentences to an amanuensis: and that inspiration is not to be confounded with verbal accuracy in the details of the narrative. In fact, inspiration, and literary and historical accuracy, are two different things, which *may* coexist, but are *not bound* to go together. Euclid's propositions are infallibly accur-

ate, and there is no escape from their relentless conclusiveness. But Euclid is about as far from being inspired as are pages of statistics: and most students can dolefully attest that Euclid is not inspiring. On the other hand, Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* is inaccurate in several details: as already mentioned, it confuses the two Brutuses, representing Marcus Brutus as occupying the place of Decimus Brutus; but it can kindle the eye, and fire the heart, and fill the mind with patriotic inspiration.

Similarly, in the case of the Bible, its inspiration is not to be confounded with the question of its fallibility or infallibility in the details of its narrative, science, or figures. From the derivation of the word we see that inspiration means "in-breathing," the inbreathing of God's Spirit; and therefore what breathes most perfectly the Spirit of God is most truly inspired. There are degrees of inspiration.

Apply this test to the various books.

Take the genealogical trees and the registers of tribes and their movements, and place them beside the 23rd or the 103rd Psalm. Take the annals of the Hebrew wars, and of the Hebrew kings, and place them beside Isaiah's lofty visions of Jehovah and uplifting appeals to his countrymen. It is not difficult for us to say whether the national annals and name-lists are on the same level of Divine inspiration with the visions of Psalmist and Prophet. This implies no depreciation of the historical records; owing to their very nature we could not rationally expect from them such lofty strains of thought and impulse as from Sacred Poetry and Prophecy. But, while the Historical books show us God's hand in the history of one race, and give us the religious philosophy of that history, their inspiration is necessarily far below some other parts of the Bible.

Nor can Esther (in which the name of God never occurs and which contains no

religion at all) be compared with Job in Divine illumination: nor Ruth with the Psalms in spiritual elevation. Each has its own place, carries its own lesson. But, as we have always recognised in the extent to which we have made use of these parts of Scripture, they vary in quality, tone, moral impulse, and inspiration. We cannot attach the same value to and recognise the same Divine authority in each and every passage indiscriminately among the different Books.

In the marvellous drama called *Job*, we do not find God's truth in every verse. For the Satan, the Accuser, is brought into the drama, and when he is represented as speaking, we must, of course, treat his utterance as of Satanic and not Divine inspiration.

Then when Job's friends gather round him, and lecture and hector him on the assumed fact that only exceptional sins on his part can account for his exceptional sufferings, we are not expected to

take their words, running through many chapters, as expressing the truth of God: the whole drama is intended to *refute* their cruel and false principles. Whilst uttering many sublime truths in their speeches, their contention is wrong, and declared to be wrong when the Almighty utters His voice out of the cloud, demanding who these are that darken counsel without knowledge.

One cannot, therefore, open Job just anywhere, and quote a verse, say, from Bildad or Eliphaz, and say, "That is in the Bible, therefore it is the Word of God." One must rather look on the Book as a drama, and gather its spiritual significance as a whole. When read thus, Job is found to be one of the grandest examples of Divine inspiration in the possession of mankind.

When we come to the Book of *Psalms*, we have to use a similar discrimination between the perfect and the imperfect. Here we reach very high and sacred

ground. What a procession of earnest spirits along the centuries have marched through human vicissitudes, nourishing and comforting themselves with these Hebrew hymns! Here is language for every mood and circumstance: the ebb and flow of faith and hope: the sore heart in an adverse world: anguish and jubilation, penitence and victory. Compare with these the songs of Greek and Latin literature. The Classics sing of bloody battles, of wine and passion; the Hebrew Psalmists, filled with the vision of the Father Spirit, sing of His spiritual perfections and saving compassion. They breathe God.

But once again we must not refuse to admit that there are sentiments expressed in *some* Psalms which might be perfectly fitting in the age in which they were composed, but which, tested by the Spirit of Jesus, are unworthy and mistaken. I refer, for example, to the vindictive imprecations and prayers. In Psalm cix. we

read: "Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand: let his prayer become sin, let his children be fatherless, and be continually vagabonds and beg. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him." Such vengeful sentiments are certainly *not* the "Word" and mind of God, and stand condemned by Him to whom we make our appeal, and who has taught us to love our enemies and return good for evil, blessing for cursing.*

How, then, are we to discriminate between the perfect and the imperfect, God's truth and man's mistaken religious sentiment? A Christian ought not to have any difficulty on that score. To him Christ is the court of appeal, the test and measure of Divine truth. In earlier and later prophets and poets the Spirit dwelt in partial degree: to Christ and Christ alone was the Spirit given without

* *Miss F. P. Cobbe tells of a boy who suggested that perhaps "God was not yet a Christian"!*

measure; and therefore He is the full-orbed, all-inspired Truth of God. Let those who believe in the Bible as a uniform, level plane, all of it of equal authority and equal inspiration, beware lest they ascribe to God the vindictive tempers and passions of the half-civilised and unsanctified.

We come to the next Book—*Proverbs*. It contains the common-sense maxims of human experience, and sound moral directions for the young and innocent—the whole forming the proverbial philosophy of the Hebrews. But its level of inspiration is not lofty. Much of it is worldly wisdom, prudential morality. It has its place in our education and guidance, and God, by putting it in our Bible, has stamped such moral teaching with His approval. When we find such a book in the Bible, we are encouraged to find something of God's wisdom in the similar writings of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, and other moral teachers.

But, here again, we dare not take its every utterance as expressing the perfect mind of God. In the last chapter we find this piece of advice: "It is not for kings to drink wine, lest they forget the law and pervert judgment. Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

If we hold the theory that every verse is the infallible word of God, it will be easy for the drink-sellers to prove out of our mouth that they are obeying God's command in helping the poor and miserable to forget their poverty and drown their misery in drink.

We must learn to discriminate between the remnants of the morals of the ancient and undeveloped ages, on the one hand, and the pure truth of Jesus Christ on the other. He that is spiritual, that hath the mind of Christ, judgeth all things.

One more example of this same principle is found in the Book of *Ecclesiastes*. Recalling its drift and leading thoughts, we can say for ourselves what is its level of inspiration. Its constant refrain is that "All is vanity: everything is vain." Its dictum is that "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and enjoy life;" that "a man has no pre-eminence above a beast." He states many tested truths about life and money and fame and toil and the heart's dissatisfaction with them all. He grapples with the terrible problem—his, ours, every man's—about the inexplicable tangle of defeated goodness, unredressed wrong, the sore sights that the sun sees every day in its round of the earth. And unquestionably this book contains the mirror of many a man's fluctuations between faith and scepticism, between hope and pessimism. Many a writer to-day stands in Ecclesiastes. It was Renan's favourite. And as a picture of dark times and crises in

our questionings, the book has its uses, its lessons and its message. Yet we cannot and must not quote it as God's mind about life, as true in every part and sentence. Its pessimism and scepticism and cynical views of life are not set down as final. It has but a dim view of a shadowy, half-conscious existence down among the shades of Sheol, and says "There is no work nor device, nor knowledge nor wisdom, in the grave whither we go." By the actual use we make of it, by the evangelical practice of leaving it to a comparative neglect, we confess that we do not rank its teaching as equally inspired with either the Psalms or the Gospels.

In speaking thus, I am not really depreciating these books, but deprecating the false theory of the Bible which would endow them with an authority which they never claim.

Perhaps it may seem to some that this method of treating such books of the Old Testament is revolutionary. But such is

really not the case. Our Lord, while making large use of the Hebrew Scriptures, treated them in this same way. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you": and He repeals old Mosaic regulations, supersedes traditionary laws as formal and imperfect. The law had said "An eye for an eye," *i.e.*, tit-for-tat, and give as good as you get. But Christ repeals such a law, forbids retaliation, and gives a higher and more divine principle of conduct. He does not treat every passage in these earlier writings as of full and final authority. He Himself speaks with a higher authority and the full inspiration of God, and appeal is to be made to Him for the complete and real mind of God. He, and He alone, is the absolute "Word of God."

We have all, as a matter of fact, been accustomed to treat much in the Old Testament in the same way. Orthodox Protestants do not feel that they are under-

mining the value of the Bible when they eliminate the priesthood and ceremonials of the Israelites as out of date. If I am asked how we are to know which parts are fully inspired and authoritative, and which parts fall short, I reply, in Scotch fashion, by putting a return question: How do you know what parts of the Mosaic system are authoritative for us, and what parts are superseded by higher laws? The Pentateuch commands the destruction of witches: who authorises you to dispense with the Old Testament belief and law? Why do you not forbid all images in art? Why have you abandoned the Sabbath and its restrictions, and set up worship on another day? How have you been accustomed to draw the line between those things that are permanent, and those things that are temporary and imperfect in the Bible? By bringing forward the test of Christ's more spiritual teaching and the larger meaning of His life. I am but taking our own unconscious

principle and practice when I show how we must discriminate all through the books between the permanent and the passing, between the fully inspired and the imperfectly inspired. The touchstone by which all is tried is the *mind of Christ.*

Not that the ancient Hebrew history and ritual, with their mistakes and imperfections, are obsolete in the sense of being useless. They contain vast stores of telling instruction, enable us to see from a religious point of view false and true and good and evil principles worked out to their issues. Here we walk through a vast gallery of men and women and nations, of all stages of moral condition, and, putting our minds under the direction of our Guide, the Holy Spirit of Christ, we are able to learn many a truth, see many an object-lesson, draw even from false conceptions our own higher Christian principle and thought. It is a vast segment of human life—many-sided, in many forms of literature, and

containing pictures representative of all life and all time. Taking our stand upon this high vantage-ground given us in Christ Jesus, we get the true point of view. Here is the true touchstone and test for all.

In divers portions, in divers degrees, in divers styles—history, drama, poetry, prophecy—God spoke to the fathers: but now, in the maturity of the world, He speaks unto us by His Son, who is the consummation of His revelation of Himself.

The Bible is like man—likest, perhaps, to a "man inspired." Within our body abides a pervading conscious mind. But is every part and member of our body equally inspired by that mind? Is it uniformly present in our vertebræ and in our brain? Foot and arm are certainly animated with an all-pervading life and force, but no sane man would contend that a foot or an arm is of equal value with the head, or may not be cut off without fatal injury to life.

The Bible has its skeleton framework of history, its extremities animated with life; yet, when a critic or an unwise defender of the Bible views its limbs apart from the body, it is not easy to prove that they are inspired. But take the entire body of the Book, not heeding every joint and muscle of it. See how it palpitates with spiritual life. We lift our eyes from its mere limbs, and look. Out of it gazes a FACE, glowing with Divine light, in which we see the image, the mirror, the Mind of God.

"Archbishop Usher tells us that the world was created on Sunday the twenty-third of October, 4004 years before the birth of Christ. Deluge, December seventh, 2348 years B.C. Yes, and the earth stands on an elephant, and the elephant on a tortoise."—THE PROFESSOR AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE.

XIII

The Dramas of "Creation" and "The Fall"

Dramatic "Acts"—Gladstone and Huxley—Chronology *v.* Monotheism—The Flower of Creation—Four Devils—Milton—The Serpent-parable—Ruskin—Mythology of Temptation—Pictorial Truth—The Original of Man.

THE Bible opens with two great Dramas: one "Creation": the other, "The Fall." They tower high at the start of human history as great dramatic types representing the secret of man's life. It is when that which is drama is taken for prosaic text-book that trouble and perplexity must follow.

i.—THE DRAMA OF "CREATION."

The curtain rises with God as the Eternal Power; and with matter already

in existence, of which no account is given. God is First: beneath Him dark, impenetrable chaos, all in a surging, fluid state.

Then the stupendous drama crosses the stage in seven mighty Acts, called "Days." In recent years we have sought to stretch these "Days" of Genesis i. into vast geologic periods. We have done this in the desperate attempt to fit the Scripture account of Creation into modern Science. We have gone further astray than even the older interpreters, who calculated a "day" at the rate of twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hours it could not be, since the sun, the divider into days, not having been as yet created, is not introduced till the fourth "day." Much less can it mean geologic epochs. The bare conception of such epochs had not arrived yet. A mysterious, cabalistic book the Bible would be, if, concealed within the ancient records there lay secret meanings forestalling the discoveries of

astronomers, biologists and historians. "Day" is used simply as the natural unit by which events are measured and distributed. Its modern equivalent is "Act."

On the first "day," in the first "Act," God bids light spring into existence and fill its sphere. That light should exist before the sun is one of the rusty, disused weapons with which Science once assailed the Bible story. But the newer Science rises up to repudiate the old criticism, and positively affirms the existence of light before the sun.

The second "day" sees the creation of the firmament, with the expanse of waters terrestrial and the expanse of waters celestial in the cloudy dome—the sky being represented throughout the book as a vaulted dome.

The third "day" witnesses the formation of *terra firma* and its vegetation. The division of the vegetable kingdom into cereals and fruit trees is neither sufficiently

comprehensive to cover the whole nor properly botanical. But it is the classification that would naturally occur to an unscientific observer dependent on the fruits of the earth for his sustenance.

On the fourth "day" God bids the sun, moon and stars "be," and they "are." Light was the first product of Creation: lights, luminaries to hold and distribute light, are the fourth.

The fifth "day" gives birth to birds and fishes, all things that creep or fly—a division, once more, that is imperfect for scientific classification, but effective for popular purposes.

The sixth "day" sees creation reach its climax, when animals and man are called into being. Again, the classification of animals into quadrupeds, &c., is popular and unscientific. The crowning work of all is man, the last and the nearest to God.

The order of these six stages may or may not correspond to the results of

geological science. As the case stands at present the two orders do not appear to perfectly harmonise. Mr. Gladstone's attempted harmony failed at certain points under Mr. Huxley's skilled analysis. If we *were* bound to defend the correspondence we might urge that, when all is said and done, there is a broad and striking resemblance between the stages of creation in Genesis and Geology: that, moreover, the science of one period is often discarded in favour of a truer in the next period, and this might conceivably be the issue in the present instance. But such a defence would be, not only halting, but directed along altogether false lines.

For, the dramatic rehearsal of creation has nothing chronological in view. It looks at things above and below as an observer would, classifies them as the eye sees them, and one by one ascribes them all to the Will and Word of God. Zoology makes a classification of animals totally

unlike chronology. If zoology, in observing resemblances of physical structure, may and even must depart from the sequence of chronology, may not a religious book use the same freedom when its purpose is not scientific, but the disclosure of God as the source of all?

The dramatic character of the composition is made apparent in the symmetry of the phrases and of the "days." The six days fall into two parallel sets of three. The first corresponds to the fourth, the second to the fifth, the third to the sixth. A masterly statement of this correspondence—a sort of Hebrew parallelism—is given in a memorable article in the *Contemporary Review** by Professor Elmslie, to whom I am much indebted in the present study.

"The first set presents us with three vast empty tenements or habitations, and

* Vol. lii. See also Professor Pritchard's *Nature and Revelation*, and Professor Pritchard and Sir G. G. Stokes in the *Expositor*, January, 1891.

the second furnishes these with occupants. The first day gives us the sphere of light: the fourth day tenants it with sun, and moon, and stars. The second day presents the realm of air and water: the fifth supplies the inhabitants—birds and fishes. The third day produces the habitable dry land: and the sixth stocks it with the animals and man."

The method is pictorial, dramatic; and the object in view is well served, namely, to comprehend all parts of creation in the one dominant, recurring thought, "GOD created them! GOD did it!" As well blame the representation of "Macbeth" on the stage for forcing the work of years into hours and successive "acts," as object to the "Drama of Creation" on the ground that it times all by "days." The whole series is passed before our eyes one by one, that the dramatist may say of each and all—"God's!"

As for the absence of an evolutionary process from the narrative, its whole

object is to march the events across the stage, to make them pass in swift succession before the eyes of the spectator, to ignore all processes, and display only God and results, to leave out secondary causes and agencies, and exhibit only the Universal Creator. God speaks! And it is done! To claim that the "days" may cover the evolutionary processes of vast epochs—however true it may be to us—is quite away from the point. The "days" are no more long ages than they are days of twenty-four hours. The intention is not to *time* the process. As with all other dramas, the method is to set great sections of the history in a rapid succession of "Acts."

The dominant idea is, not Nature, but God. Verb follows verb with GOD as the triumphant subject. Other religions saw gods in the elements and powers of Nature. Some worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars. Others bowed in blind homage before the beasts and the stones.

Others turned horses into gods. Sky and sea and land were thus set under the control of rival divinities. Polytheism, superstition, fetishism, held men in mental and moral degradation.

The Scripture story is given under the Divine direction to cleanse religion of these grotesque and local gods, and to liberate man from the enslavement of superstition. Mr. Gladstone in his *Impregnable Rock* calls it the "charter of monotheism." It takes every department or "Kingdom" of visible Creation—above, around, beneath: sky, sea, earth: sun and moon: birds and fishes: beasts and man—and reveals the Living God behind them all, and "*leaves us on our knees before Him.*"

Clearly it has nothing to do with geology; it is theology. Its eye is not upon science; but it *is* upon prevalent Nature-worship and superstition. It reveals God as the Source of all, Himself beyond all and not merged and lost in

Nature. It endows man with his true dignity, enfranchises him in God's universe, by setting him forth as the highest product of the earth's creation.

It is this that lifts Genesis i. immeasurably above the Chaldean traditions of Creation, which are unspiritual and polytheistic. The contrast between the Bible Genesis and the Chaldean Genesis is as marked and impressive as the difference between Milton's poetic conception and Huxley's *American Addresses*. It is this religious quality, and not its science, which reveals its proper inspiration. The only legitimate question is, not whether the order of the "days" keeps time with the periods of evolution, but whether the Divine source of all in God is true.

"A young child," says Professor Pritchard, "I would teach Genesis as it stands. To an intelligent youth I would say: This is the tradition of an ancient vision, aided by God, for the

purpose of teaching men, in the infancy of the world, that the God of the Hebrew fathers created the world and all that therein is, in love and wisdom. The verses or visions are pictures of what God has done, not of the order or the means by which He did it. It is a divine moral tale, not a scientific memoir."

ii.—THE DRAMA OF "THE FALL."

LITERATURE has given us four typical conceptions of the Spirit of Evil—Luther's Devil, Milton's Satan, Goethe's Mephistopheles, and Burns's De'il. The popular English conception has nothing in common with the mocking, mischief-making tormentor of *Faust*. It has only a remote kinship with Luther's sly, human, practical spy of a Devil. It owes almost everything to Milton's magnificent creation, Satan. We picture to our minds the rebel archangel, splendid in his

pride, more splendid in his fall, resolved to take revenge upon the Almighty, alighting upon the new-made Earth, entering a serpent and through its agency beguiling Mother Eve. And we naïvely associate the whole tragedy with Scripture.

If we are to see the "Fall" in its primitive reality, we must rid our minds of Milton. The grandiose, stagey figure which the blind poet created—where in the Bible is there anything to justify it? As a poet's vision it is perfectly legitimate; for the poet must present his vision in vivid, symbolic form. But as an interpretation of the actual "Fall" of Man, is it not misleading?

Are we to take the story of Eden literally? Was there a Garden somewhere on our globe, within whose unscalable walls grew a tree whose fruit could make immortal? Was there another tree in the centre of the garden which held the fatal elixir of the knowledge of good

and evil? Did a snake crawl towards innocent Eve, and assume a human voice, and employ the Hebrew tongue, as Milton says:—

> "In at his mouth
> The Devil enter'd
> and towards Eve
> Address'd his way: not with indented wave,
> Prone on the ground as since; but on his rear
> Circular base of rising folds."

And did it hold a parley with the unsuspecting, unstartled Eve upon God's orders, and by specious and transparent insinuations, induce the simple Mother of Mankind to stretch out her hand and pluck the fruit and eat? Did Jehovah, while walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, miss the pair, and literally call aloud to them? Was the snake condemned to crawl on its belly (had it previously "walked erect," as Matthew Henry says) and eat dust? Were the fallen pair literally taken to the orchard gate and driven out?

> "To the Eastern gate
> Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
> To the subjected plain, then disappear'd.
> They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
> Waved over by that flaming brand."

Would there, but for Eve's one act, have been no pain of child-birth, no thorns and thistles, no crawling snake, no sweat of labour, and no physical death?

Now the *fact* is that, according to the testimony of the fossils, snakes never appear to have travelled otherwise than on their bellies; that they do not eat dust; and that, upon the sure word of Geology, death reigned, and thorns and thistles grew, long before the appearance of man.

Some will say, "Confound facts," and stick to their theories. Before these facts were known, some dreamers sought the site of the Garden in Persia, others in the South Sea Islands, and others in certain undiscovered islands of the Western Ocean. But as continents and oceans

came to be explored, no "garden wall'd around" was found, no "flaming brand" was seen. Then came the theory—Luther's no less—that it had been destroyed and every trace of it wiped out in the Flood—a convenient refuge for the distressed theorist.

Probably those who possess the historic sense will instinctively feel that here we have a story, only too true in its net moral significance, but largely allegorical and charmingly pictorial in its dress of incident. The choice does not lie between the literal interpretation on the one hand, and the denial of the truth of the story on the other. Truth may be dramatised, as in the Book of Job, and as all admit when they come to interpret the Book of Revelation. They have no sense of disloyalty to the Bible when they understand as figurative "the white horse," "that old serpent," or "the tree of life which bare twelve manner of fruits." As little is it disloyal to the Bible (disrobed of

Paradise Lost) to take the Garden Scene of Genesis as a stupendous fact encased in allegory or cast in dramatic form.

So completely parabolic is the story that it consistently makes the tempter a real snake, a "brute snake," and nothing more. It does not suggest that the Devil has become incarnate in a serpent, or is using it as a mouthpiece. It is Milton alone who has put the idea into our heads.

The Serpent is set not as the tool or mouthpiece of Satan, but as the type or symbol of the Spirit of Evil—"that old serpent, the Devil and Satan." Could any emblem of the universal Tempter be more apt than the snake—beautiful, lithe and glittering, so that a child will rush to play with it: subtle and crafty: able to fascinate and overpower by a secret spell, hiding its presence, sudden in its backward-blow, carrying venom in its fangs, and sending swift death through its victim's veins? In almost all the ancient

mythologies of the East it (sometimes the dragon) is taken as the symbol of the powers of evil.

Ruskin, in his *Queen of the Air*, calls the snake "that running brook of horror. Why that horror? We all feel it, yet how imaginative it is, how disproportioned it is to the real strength of the creature! There is more poison in an ill-kept drain. . . Startle it;—the winding stream will become a twisted arrow; the wave of poisoned life will lash through the grass like a cast lance. It scarcely breathes with its one lung (the other shrivelled and abortive); it is cold or hot like a stone; yet 'it can outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger.' It is a Divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth." And as such it is used in the oldest Scripture allegory. Fit symbol of the Tempter, truly. If he came to us with the traditional horns and hoofs, or if he made a snake do the speaking,

our shock of surprise would be our security. But he comes with glow and glamour, to mesmerise judgment with strange fascinations, to suggest suspicion of moral laws, to excite curiosity, to promise wisdom, and then to sting with a sense of shame and spoil Eden innocence.

Most races of men have parallel traditions of an age of innocence, of a tree of immortality, and of a forbidden fruit. In Arian mythology it is Zeina, who lives in the age of perfection till sin appears and drives him out for a thousand years, to be taken under the sway of the Serpent. In Scandinavian story the apples of immortality are left in the care of innocent Idhunna and pure Bragi, and Loki the Tempter brings from the forest other apples that deceive and destroy them. Indians, Assyrians, and Greeks alike dream of a tree of life; and on sculptures and sarcophagi a tree appears as the emblem of immortality. Greek legend

dreams of the garden of the Hesperides, whose golden apples are guarded by the Serpent. The Sacred Books of the East, the Sagas of the North, and the antiquities collected in the works of Rawlinson and Sayce, contribute many "broken reflections" of the Story of the Fall.

This broad resemblance, in spite of the variation in the names and incidents, points back to the time when the human family was yet unscattered, and reflects in varied allegory the one truth of the universal consciousness of a "fall" in man's history. Surely a Bible story is not the less credible or true because found in some shape in other sacred books:—

> "Since everywhere the Spirit walks
> The garden of the heart and talks
> With man, as under Eden trees,
> In all his varied languages."

Whether "Adam" and "Eve" were actual historical personages, or are merely selected types of the human race, it is probably impossible to determine. Nor

does it matter. In either case the moral significance of the story is the same. The races of the world are one family, a brotherhood. Temptation and moral evil have met and infected all men. The "Eden" crisis is universally true—the test case of mankind. Adam's is the "original," the typical experience and sin. And, as it was with the infant race of man, so it is with every child and youth; he finds himself in a Garden of Choice. He emerges from the instinct stage, the age of the "Marble Faun," and grows "wise" in the contradiction between good and ill. It is conscience that feels itself "naked" and makes apron excuses and fig-leaf pretences. And in the cool of the day, at the evening hour of worship and meditation, when God walks in His garden seeking human fellowship, the guilty heart hides from Him. Then Sin casts its own dark hue on labour and child-birth, on thorns and thistles, and even death. The "flaming sword" at

the gate of the garden is set, not as we had imagined, to keep men *out*, but to "keep the way," that is, to preserve it undefiled, to "keep" the holy home secure for the fit. God's holiness is the keeper of the Universe from devastation. And when "Paradise Lost" gives place to "Paradise Regained," the new way of life must lead through recovered, redeemed goodness.

"But, mother, why did not God keep the serpent out of the garden altogether?" The child's very natural question—these terrible little hecklers!—touches the final problem of all, the enigma at which every inquiry ultimately lands, the *bête noir* of the human mind.

The story of the "Fall" suggests no clue to the *Origin of Evil*. To refer it to the Devil is only to trace it one step further back and leave the mystery as dark as ever—much as Lord Kelvin supposed the arrival of some life-bearing

ball from another part of the universe as the explanation of life on the earth.

One thing seems clear, however. A being that could not possibly go wrong could have no moral character. We cannot conceive any such thing as moral goodness which is not the negation or free refusal of moral evil. Temptation—not sin, but temptation—appears to be a necessary stage in the production of moral character, as may be seen to-day when a parent tries to keep a youth shut away from all knowledge of the world and produces a milksop, a weakling and no man. A being cannot be said to do right or to be virtuous who is not potentially free to do wrong. Moral goodness requires for its moral quality the possibility of its contradictory, moral badness.

Here confessedly we are working with ideas which we cannot resolve further into simpler elements. But, as we find ourselves constituted—and we cannot think or argue at all beyond the limitations of

our own constitution—we can imagine only one way in which God might make beings who could not sin, namely, by making them devoid of freedom, and, because incapable of going wrong, mere machines.

The question, whether a "Fall" can be harmonised with evolution, will be discussed in the next chapter. Meanwhile, this ancient Bible drama anticipates and sums up the direst experience of the whole race of mankind—stands forth as a universal type and object-lesson.

"Man knows not in what rank to place himself."—PASCAL.

XIV

Was Man, too, Evolved?

Darwinian Ancestry—Copernicus—Out of Dust—Gradual *v.* Sudden Creation—Topsy—Evolution not Self-creation—The Latent God—From the Ovule to the Man—Spencer—Moral Development—The Fall—Donatello—The Crisis of Ascent—Christ in Evolution.

MAN is naturally sensitive upon the delicate question of his origin. He has, he thinks, two good grounds for prejudice against the theory of human evolution. One is the peril in which it seems to put his belief that he was created by Divine act and in the Divine image. The other is the degradation of having his ancestry traced back to the animal creation, and of being linked with creatures that would compromise his dignity.

It is no longer possible to ignore the theory of evolution as if it were a foolish craze or an idle speculation. Whether it be true in all its details as elaborated by

Darwin it is not for us to say. Even its promoters do not claim that it is perfectly demonstrated. It may very well happen that future research will necessitate some modifications in the Darwinism of to-day.

Copernicus was, on the whole, right when he broached his heresy that the earth revolved round the sun. But his formula for its motion was inaccurate. The orbit which he supposed to be a circle turns out to be really an ellipse. But, even if in the future similar corrections require to be made in the current theory of evolution, it must be reckoned with as being true in its main idea.* Accepting

* Are there not hints and reasons for imagining for instance, that, instead of one continuous straight line of equally-distributed development, the evolutionary processes advanced until they reached some pregnant combination, followed by some periodic birth of higher conditions, and this, not in any abnormal way, but as part of the evolutionary method? Le Conte, in his helpful work on *Evolution*, says: "When hydrogen and oxygen are brought together under proper conditions, water is born—a new thing with new properties and powers. When the necessary conditions are present, a new and

it, "without prejudice," as a working hypothesis, we must ask how it affects the Divine origin of man, his dignity and his religious faith.*

1. Taking the second ground of prejudice first, it is perfectly natural that man should feel his dignity compromised by the "poor relations" who are foisted upon him by the Darwinians. Even the Zoological Gardens cannot fail to suggest painful associations. This instinctive revulsion is a protest of human nature to which we must give due weight. It is an insurrection, however, which is based partly upon a misapprehension, as we shall see immediately.

higher form of force at once appears, like a birth into a higher sphere" (p. 297). Better still for our purpose, Mr. Romanes says in his *Mental Evolution of Man:* "There is some reason to think that when this growth has attained a certain point, it makes, so to speak, a sudden leap of progress, which may be taken to bear the same relation to the development of the mind as the act of birth does to that of the body."

* This chapter was written some time ago, previous to the appearance of certain popular books upon the subject.

After all, what need offend us in the current supposition of a gradual creation of the human race by development from inferior beings? There is nothing more abhorrent in that supposition than in the familiar fact that physically we are animals, having bone for bone, organ for organ, almost nerve for nerve, the same as other vertebrates and mammal . We are born in the same way and nourished on the same food. The embryonic ovule of a man is indistinguishable for a considerable time from that of the nearest of kin among the higher animals. So accustomed have we become to these points of identity that we feel in no way compromised by them. We know that what endows us with our true value and distinction does not lie in our animal nature. And if we are bound to suppose that human evolution took place somewhat after the Darwinian method, we need not resent it as a degradation and indignity any more than we resent as

an insult our very apparent resemblance to animals in our physical construction, or the destination of our bodies—the grave and decomposition. We had better remember that on our material side we are animals, whatever our origin may have been.

"Made out of dust" sounds clean and Biblical, no doubt. The old dust-theory seemed to make man only a little lower than the angels: evolution, only a little higher than the brutes. The latter Carlyle was pleased to call the "gospel of dirt." But his phrase would in truth be more fittingly accepted as another expression for the gospel of "dust"! When it is closely considered, natural prejudice aside, there is no degradation in having been created either out of "dust" or out of living creatures, if the act or process of creation was of God's doing.

Said Bishop Butler in his *Analogy*: "If pride causes us to deem it an indignity that our race should have proceeded by

propagation from an ascending scale of inferior organisms, why should it be a more repulsive idea to have sprung immediately from something less than man in brain and body than to have been fashioned out of the dust of the ground?"

2. The other ground of prejudice is the more serious of the two. Many feel that man is dethroned from the high honour of having been created in the image of God if his origin be traced backward through evolutionary processes. The apparent gain of the old theory is that it dignifies man by attributing his whole being direct and *instanter* to God's special ukase and action. His divine origin strikes us more vividly when we imagine the Almighty God forming his body *per saltum*, out of hand, and then into the waiting frame breathing the breath of life that made him a living soul.

But are we to admit the divine origin of nothing save what has been dramatically and instantaneously uttered into shape?

Must God's creative activity proceed without intermediate processes? Is God to be seen only in the irregular and the distant and the unknown? Before Newton's day, men believed that it was God who poised the stars and planets in their courses; it was God alone who did it. But when Newton proclaimed the universal law of gravitation, people were disposed to imagine *law*, and no longer God, as the force that swayed the stellar motions.

It is curious, says Martineau, that whenever people find out *how* a thing was done, they instinctively conclude that God did not do it! As rationally might we explain a railway train by referring to the parallel metals along which it moves. Laws of nature are not forces or agents, but are parallel lines along which the divine driving force proceeds. The lines along which the upward movement of creation proceeded have, it is believed, been discovered. But these discovered lines of evolution do not dispense with

the need of the driving Power and the directing intelligence which carry the operation upward to a lofty destination.*

Slow creation requires God as much as instantaneous creation. When an operation is spread over a myriad years, it does not become self-acting. Time is not an element of causation. The creation of the human race from inferior creatures and through age-long processes is a work as divine as the sudden manufacture of a man would be. "I spec's I growed," said Topsy, by way of explaining the mystery of her existence. "It growed" is the explanation which is sometimes given of creation, as if it could grow of itself by feeding upon "laws." To trace things back from the complex to the simple is not to explain away the necessity for creative activity. As well accept the ancient cosmogony which supposed the

* Says Tyndall: "Evolution does not solve—it does not profess to solve—the ultimate mystery of the universe. It leaves, in fact, that mystery untouched."

world to be a huge four-cornered table-land, resting on four elephants, the elephants on turtles, the turtles on sea-serpents, the sea-serpents on star-fish, the star-fish on jelly-fish!

If a molecule were suddenly to become a man, we should attribute the result to God. If we see a molecule and a long spiral of ascending life with man at the summit, shall we regard the result as less wonderful and less dependent on God? Could the molecule by taking thought build its own spiral staircase and evolve a man and creation out of its mysterious womb? Such a molecule, having in itself the potentiality of the orderly universe and human intelligence, would be—God!*

* It is a fine piece of legerdemain to smuggle in at the back door of a molecule, under cover of the innocent-looking word "potency," all the powers of the Almighty Creator, in order to be able to bring out at the front door organic life, and man's mind—anything at will! Such primordial germs, charged like torpedoes, with tremendous internal potency, would be monstrosities—"manufactured articles," as Herschell called them, invented in a study as a *deus ex machinâ*.

It is not the suddenness of its appearance which makes the human race, or anything else, divine in its origin. What we require to conceive is not a magical "Hey, presto!" with instantaneous results, but the continuous presence of a Creative Power underlying the whole process, an infinite activity animating the operation from first to last, not centred in some Citadel and Metropolis outside our universe, not merely endowing germs, nor "interfering" at certain stages to add a new power, but perpetually immanent, the indwelling creative Energy, the eternally living Spirit from whom *all* creation lives and moves and takes its being. Is God required as the explanation of sudden creation? Then He is as much required as the explanation of slow creation. Evolution is not another name for self-creation, though it is sometimes spoken of as if it were; it is a bigger word for growth; it only indicates the discovery that creation took form, not instan-

taneously, but through slow and regular processes. These slow and regular processes require an eternal and methodical God as the infinite Evolver. Only, God is not now conceived as fitful in His activity, but continuous; nor as an external Master-mechanic, but as "the latent everywhere," the indwelling Soul of His body-universe. It is God who must be conceived all along the line as the moving Life of all.*

It is, no doubt, a greater tax upon our imagination at first, but is ultimately a

* This may appear to be perilously like incipient Pantheism. Well, it was high time that men should rid their minds of the old Mechanism, and regain the long-lost element of Pantheism which is indicated in the Bible. For there God is Personal, yet "in Him we live and move and have our being." What the human mind is in the body, an indwelling personality, God may be in His universe, the Under-Soul of all, yet none the less Personal on that account. The Incarnation, as described in the Fourth Gospel, displays the "Logos," or Personal "Word" as dwelling in all things made. Cf. also ubrey Moore's brilliant essays, *Science and the Faith*, and St. Clair's *Darwinism and Design*.

gain, to think of the Divine Presence underlying a process spread over a myriad ages, and thus eternally at work, than causing perfect creatures to leap into being at His command. For, as Martineau says, "in drawing upon it, a logical theft is more easily committed piecemeal than wholesale. Surely it is a mean device for a philosopher thus to crib causation by hair-breadths, to put it out at compound interest through all time, and then disown the debt."

The evolution of a man (*vir*) from an embryo is the type of the evolution of humanity (*homo*) from lower forms of existence. The advance from the ovule to the mature adult is a microcosm, the history and sum in miniature, of the evolution of the human race.

George Macdonald asked—

"Where did you come from, baby dear?"

We put the question with all the seriousness of men who know they are asking the

secret of human creation. Where *does* the little son of man, where does the mature man, come from? We are not content to refer, by way of explanation, merely to such physical sources as propagation and nutrition. The source of his intelligence and moral sense is not to be found in the materials which have gone to his formation.

Is his origin less divine because he has developed from germ-plasm, throughout all the stages of ascending animal types, until he has become a man? Is he *not* "in the image of God," since in his embryonic stage he was once "in the image of" an inferior creature? Do his humble beginnings, do the protracted processes of his mystic development, detract from his worth as a rational and moral being? If the evolution of Milton from an infant and an embryo does not rob him of his greatness, the evolution of the human race from inferior forms of life does not reduce the worth of

human nature nor deprive man of a divine origin.

> "How did they all just come to be *you?*
> God thought about me, and so I grew.'

From mysterious spiritual sources, from an underlying divine Spirit, must arise the intelligence and conscience of every child. Though the process be slow and long, the creative presence is as much required and as necessarily at work, as if an ovule instantaneously leaped up to mature manhood.

And if man's rational and moral nature must be supposed to have been developed through long and varied processes, that is not to trace his mind and conscience "from below." Do the child's, and finally the man's, mind and conscience come "from below," because they slowly emerge in infinitesimal stages and through numberless experiences? There is no instant at which intelligence and moral sense are breathed into a child; no single instant, because at every instant the Breath

(Spirit) divine is ascending into his expanding being.

Said Herbert Spencer, writing to Mill: "I believe that the experiences of utility organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race, have been producing corresponding nervous modifications which, by continued transmission and accumulation have become in us certain faculties of moral intuitions—certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility."

I do not dare to pronounce upon the profound question here raised. But even if Spencer be right, what then? The result is no less divine, the moral nature no less authoritative, because man's moral texture has been slowly and intricately woven in countless experiences. It takes a Divine Power to organise and consolidate experiences, and out of utilitarian and prudential motives to create our

present intuitions, and give to conscience that something more—"O the little more, and how much it is!"—that something more than a sense of utility, that intuitional and authoritative moral sense, which is man's glory. If this higher nature was slowly capitalized and built into man's constitution, I do not see that it is less divine in its origin and its value. The eternal Presence might in this as well as in any other way inweave "His own image" into the fabric of human nature. Conscience has the authority of that which created it, no matter by what process it was created. If He made it, He meant it, no matter by what path He made it.

Christians are accustomed to glory in the fact that, out of pain and sorrow and life's manifold prosaic discipline, the Divine Spirit creates the higher virtues and finer graces of the Christian character. If these earthly experiences may be transmuted by the Spirit's alchemy

into qualities of character, may not powers of mind and conscience be brought forth out of corresponding experiences? "Flesh yields mere basement for the soul's emprise."

At any rate, it is in this fashion that a *child's* powers develop. Out of sensations, accumulated experiences, deepening instinct, and out of prudential and utilitarian motives for conduct, emerges the fulness of the stature of manhood. "Education," says Oliver Wendell Holmes, "always begins through the senses, and works up to the idea of absolute right and wrong. The first thing the child has to learn about this matter is, that lying is unprofitable,—afterwards that it is against the peace and dignity of the universe." As with the child, so with the race.

After the same fashion we see the evolution of intelligence and moral sensibility among savage races. Britons were once barbaric, and stand forth as a living witness to the continuous presence of a

Power which is creating man in "His own image."

Yet, be it observed, while evolution may give the scientific account of the *method* of creation, the dramatic account given in Genesis is, after all, the more true of the two. Not so true as to processes, but surpassingly true as an explanation of the source of all, as a revelation of that which lies beyond the province of science—the Infinite Power underlying all, the secret Life of all. Genesis condenses the age-long processes into swift acts, withdraws the mind from intermediate stages, and sums up the whole in "days," revealing the Eternal God as the fountain of all. George Macdonald's poetic child utters deeper truth than appears to a mere evolutionist: states, better than he, the ultimate value of man and the secret of the universe—

"God thought about me, and so I grew."

Over all the processes of evolution, "the Spirit of God broods." As in the highest

of all births and all incarnations of God, "the Holy Ghost overshadows," and out of the womb of human flesh is born a child "in the image of God."

3. Has the "Fall" of man a place in evolution? It is not so inconsistent with the onward march of creation as it appears to be at first sight.

The problem has been complicated by the introduction of the word "Fall," which is not employed in Scripture. It conveys the idea of a positively backward tide, a descent from a level previously attained. What Genesis presents to its readers is first an age of innocence, during which moral distinctions—"the knowledge of good and evil"—have not been discovered, and then the development of the moral faculty, with its contents of good and ill.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, as already hinted above, lends us a clue to the truth when, in the *Marble Faun* (otherwise entitled *Transformation*), he pictures Donatello

existing in a state of sub-human innocence, until the day when he commits a crime, and the latent faculty of conscience awakes, and his soul moves and grows, and he emerges into human endowments The passage from the Donatello-stage to the Adamic-stage is the transition from mere instinct-innocence to moral distinctions and moral character.

> "In man there's failure only since he left
> The lower and unconscious forms of life."

There are barbaric races of mankind in whom this discovery of good and evil is still slowly arising. They live a mere life of instinct, scarcely perceiving theft or lying to be inherently wrong, only regarding it as punishable when found out, having not as yet risen to the Christian conception of sin. As they ascend in the human scale, moral distinctions multiply upon them, and life becomes more complex, bringing them greater possibilities, new heights as well as new depths of character. Some people think that these

"children of Nature" should be left in their instinct life; but it is a vain dream. The transition must come. As it comes, it is a stage in evolution, and yet it involves the risks of "fall" as well as the chances of ascent.

Every child passes through the same transition. At first a little Donatello, or bundle of instincts, he soon discovers, first through collision with authority and law, the wider sphere of good and evil. He "falls": yet his "fall" occurs in that process by which he ascends to a higher level of existence.

Thus a "Fall" is possible only as beings emerge from a lower to a higher grade of life, and the moral development implies possible degeneration. Of such degeneration, "reversion ever dragging evolution in the mud," nature is full. In plant-life, for example, reversion to a lower type is a familiar fact—a botanic "fall." Of a similar kind, on a larger scale, is the human "fall." But whether in plants or in

human beings, the "fall" belongs to a stage of transition and development. Beecher called it a "Fall upwards,"—a paradox with truth in it.

There can be no return to "Eden" innocence: its gates are closed to man. All that is possible—and that is a condition far in advance of the lost estate—is conquest of evil, the attainment of redeemed manhood. A door is open in Heaven, for those morally fit to survive.

4. It is not irreverent to ask whether there is any place in evolution for the Divine Christ. I venture to hint that in the higher reaches of this process He has a place, and a very sublime function to perform.

No one will suppose me to mean that He can be *accounted for* on any such principle as this, or that He is a mere product of any process. In none of the present series of discussions am I pretending to offer any adequate theory or science

of Christ, or my own conception of all that lay in Christ. Yet He *may* be considered from the point of view of this comprehensive process which God has conducted from state to state, and which He is still conducting to loftier ends.

The entrance of Christ into humanity marks a distinct stage in the higher development of man. He brings a new birth from above, a new and diviner life by which receptive spirits ascend to a more elevated level and quality of existence. By Him God defeats the degeneration rendered imminent in the stage of moral freedom. He introduces a new and finer type of being. If in "Adam" we had the "original" of sin, in Christ we have the original of sanctity or spirituality. He has been the force by which God has produced in the very heart of humanity the creation of a higher spiritual being who shares something of the "eternal life" of God.

But how can a supernatural or divine

Being appear in the course of evolution? One can only offer hints here, where the subject deserves profound study. The difficulty is reduced when we think of the Divine Power as operating all the way upwards through creation, infusing life in its ever-ascending quality. The passage from the non-living to the living, and again from the non-moral to the moral, is, to mere science, inexplicable—supernatural. The Immanent Spirit who has breathed into man his mental and moral life may breathe into man a still diviner life, may bring forth a Son of moral and spiritual Divinity, the first-born of many brethren and the creator of a new creation. It is a great mystery, indeed, but a mystery only richer than the entrance of intelligence and moral sense into man: only less comprehensible because belonging to a finer, higher realm of being. This may be made a little clearer in the next chapter.

We have a right to ask why God should

not be supposed to have higher development for the human spirit? Is *brain* the utmost limit of creation? Are we to forsake our evolutionary principle when it rises to a rarer and more spiritual atmosphere, and gives promise of the highest attainment of all? If God has incarnated in men more and more of His own being, why should He not give an incarnation "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," all the moral and spiritual perfection which can be embodied in humanity?

"What, my soul, see thus far and no farther?
When doors great and small
Flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth
appal?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in
the greatest of all?"

"*What men could scarcely know by their greatest light, Christianity has taught to babes.*"—PASCAL.

XV

Man's Dream of his own Greatness

Copernican Dethronement of Man—Measurements of Greatness—Master Mind—Darwin's Re-enthronement of Man—Spirit Supreme—The Outskirts of His Ways—The Ascent of the Under-Soul—Base Humanity—The Price of Manhood—Working out the Beast.

MAN, it is said by some and felt by many, possibly over-values his own importance. Has he not an absurdly exaggerated idea of his own worth in the boundless sweep of Creation in imagining himself to be immortal and in thinking that the Eternal would care so much for his insect existence as to become incarnate among men for their redemption?

This claim may have been rational enough in the days when the Earth was understood to be the centre round which other orbs revolved. But now that man's

world is but an insignificant speck among the myriad suns, and man, more than before, an infinitesimally mean item in the moving universe, can he still believe himself the beloved of God?

"'What are men that He should heed us?' cried
the King of sacred song:
Insects of an hour that hourly work their
brother insect wrong."

"Like the raw son of the patriarch, he believed that the sun, moon, and stars, and the fruits of the ground bowed down and did him obeisance. The Copernican theory dethroned him in Space. The discoveries in Geology dethroned him in Time. And—unkindest cut of all—the Darwinian has dethroned him from that unique position which he believed himself to have occupied. He believed himself to be the privileged possessor of a brand-new world, which was specially completed for him; but, behold, there were æons and races before him."*

* Boyd Carpenter's *Permanent Elements of Religion.*

1. Physically, man is insignificant enough. But he is worth more than his bulk in matter. When analysed, an average man is found to be composed of water, carbon, phosphorus, sulphur, potassium, iron, &c. In Bethnal Green Museum they may be seen in some fifteen bottles ranged side by side! Such is man when set in comparison with the universe as science knows it. In the comparison this method of measuring man stumbles upon its *reductio ad absurdum*.

No one would propose that the standard of value in creation should be that of the yardstick or of the scales. The Koh-i-noor is worth more that Ben Nevis. The Venus of Milo is more precious than the Colossus of Rhodes. A child is greater than the elephant he tremulously rides on.

> "Life apparent in the poorest midge
> Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self."

There is a certain vulgarity of mind in calculating value in God's sight by cubic inches. Something in man enables him

to dominate all living creatures, compared with whom he is physically a mere reed, that they could, if they had but wit enough, tread and crush under them. The forces of the earth, too, are one by one yielding themselves to the control of man's mind. From a moth to a man is a vaster leap than from the earth to Sirius, because quality of existence counts for more than quantity, and spirit must count for incalculably more than matter in the estimate of a Supreme Spirit.

Mere bulk of star-matter cannot by sheer bigness outweigh mind. Pile up mountain on mountain, world on world, and you have only multiplied molecules of matter; man's mind would "sit above it all," alone with God and the angels. The very bigness of it is possible only to Thought. The numberless suns in space, which crush our minds with their overshadowing greatness, are yet unconscious, we may believe, of their own existence. Greater than they is the mind that can

sweep the untrodden ocean of space, and gather them into its imagination.

The first effect of the Copernican Astronomy was naturally to shake men's faith in the Christian conception of their dignity and status in creation. When Science proclaimed that the earth was not, after all, the centre and capital round which the planetary system revolved, but was instead a mere child's ball in a universe of gigantic suns, devout men protested that such a theory degraded man by reducing him a million-fold in value, and discredited the Bible and resulted in Atheism. The present-day horror of Darwinism is trifling compared with the Church's indignation centuries ago against the new science of Galileo.

But time passed, and the new astronomy, in stretching out the universe, enlarged and magnified men's conception of God, made His infinitude more awe-inspiring, and was ultimately found to discredit neither jot nor tittle of the Bible and its

revelation. Nor has it belittled man. In belittling his body it has enhanced his mind. It was Mind that traversed space and perceived the method of stellar motions. It is, to-day more than ever, man's mind which is mapping out the course of the created universe, weighing and measuring all, and grasping all with something of a Creator's supremacy.

Was it Professor Clifford who uttered the *mot* that the heavens no longer declare the glory of God, but the glory of Newton's mind? We thank that brave Nihilist for assuring us, in the name of Science, that man's mind is not lost and buried amid the boundless worlds, that the discoveries of the star-filled universe are no depreciation but an enhancement of human greatness.

The place lost under the new Astronomy is won back under Evolution. What Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler did for Space, Darwin and his comrades have

done for Time - creation—have stretched it out into inconceivable reaches. At first the blinding vista of Evolution's myriad stages and appalling processes overwhelms our mind, and faith staggers and cries, What then becomes of man? But man fares nobly, and out of the changed conditions he emerges greater than ever. Evolution displays man as the culmination and crown of the earth's development throughout the countless epochs of its past. If the telescope dwarfed him and left him paltry amid the stars, evolution enthrones him as the consummation and ultimate product of *one* orb in space.* Darwin's book was strangely misnamed the *Descent of Man*. What it reveals is the † Ascent

* Mr. Fiske, whose authority is as high as that of any expert, says: "On earth there will never be a higher creature than man." Dr. Clelland declares that "the human body is the highest form of human life possible, subject to the conditions of matter on the surface of the globe, and that the structure completes the design of the animal kingdom."

† This chapter was written before Professor Drummond's *Ascent of Man* was issued.

of Man, and Mathilde Blind has been the first to seize and use that more descriptive phrase for the title of her extraordinary poem. That which is most fully matured at the summit of the world's ascent cannot be regarded as trivial and poor, even though its physical frame be of small dimensions. What is slowly and laboriously produced lasts. That which in man has been laboriously and painfully produced is Mind, and it is Mind which may therefore be expected to last.

Man may *seem* an ephemeral insect, too mean for God to regard and reclaim. But if the Supreme be a Spirit, man as a spirit is nearer and more akin to that Spirit than any of the unconscious isles that float in the ocean of space. It is the moral and mental creation in man that enfranchises him in the Divine constituency.

Very probably man is by no means the one and favourite child of creation. The very Book which endows him with high

rank gives glimpses of other beings serener and loftier than he—who, one may venture to imagine, may have been bred and perfected on some of the orbs which, as Science says, have finished their course. God is not so limited in His resources, one may suppose, as to have only one idea, namely, that idea which has been wrought out on this globe. Other types of existence, finer and higher than our own, and inconceivable to us, may be assumed to be the purpose and fulfilment of other spheres. We are overwhelmed by the sight of vast orbs that make earth a speck. But can we rationally suppose that in all these scenes in the blue deep there are no forms of existence more immaterial than what the eye can possibly see, perhaps of kin in spirit with ourselves?

It is for poets to dream of the possible romances of existence that may cluster round those "points of peaceful light" which greet us as we look forth upon the

nightly spectacle from our seat on the rim of this wheeling globe. What visions of other modes of being may furnish forth interest for those who rise to the spirit's eternal life! At any rate, there is no justification for thinking of the Eternal Father, either before or after the making of man's world and spirit, as withdrawn into everlasting inactivity, or Buddhahood. I indulge the idea that it may only be for Earth and for each individual sphere and creature that there is a "Beginning" and a "Sabbath," and that the Infinitude of Time may be as endlessly filled with the acts of eternal creation as infinite Space is filled with stars.

But, if He be thus infinite, His infinitude, like a mathematical straight line, stretches not only up to the infinitely great, but also down to the infinitely little. A Being who is able to attend only to Orion, and not at all to a small planet and its tenants, is great, very great, but not great enough to fulfil the

conditions of the Eternal and Infinite Creator.

Some one in a vagrant mood of mind has bidden us suppose that on Jupiter, which is twelve hundred times larger than the Earth, there may be men who are twelve hundred times taller than we are, that is to say, a mile and a-quarter in height. Would these dimensions recommend them to the consideration and affections of the All-Father? This, of course, is to make foolish play of the question,—but perhaps to make plain how foolish and irrational is the notion that the Creator's interest in His universe proceeds upon a material standard of measurement.

Our hope that God has us in His thought and sympathy rests mainly on our moral and spiritual status in creation.

But that God should come and dwell with men—how dare we cherish a belief so proud and yet so parochial? Not easily, if we are accustomed to think of the Eternal God as located in some distant

capital and requiring to make a long journey to reach this outpost of His dominions. Not easily, if He be conceived as dwelling in a material Metropolitan Citadel. But it is not so difficult if He be conceived as the Under-Soul of *all*, the Spirit who is the life of all that is. If He is the immanent God, in whom all things live and move and have their being, if the spiritual be not *yonder* in space, but *within*, underlying all forms of existence, yet not lacking in personality any more than man's mind lacks personality because indwelling within his body, *then* God does not require to "come" from afar to dwell with men, but need only *rise* and *fill* the living temple which He chooses.

It is the Ascent of God, rather than the Descent of God which best assists our mind in conceiving the entrance of God into humanity. Of course, both "ascent" and "descent" are alike metaphors borrowed from the latitudes of material

space. And the "descent" of the divine power probably has advantages as the most impressive figure of the spiritual reality. Yet here, in the present difficulty, the *rise*, or ascent, of the Inmost Spirit of all, may come to one's aid in conceiving how God might enter into humanity, might fill the Son of Man with all the fulness of God-hood, so far as it can be incarnated "bodily," making Him thus, not a "double personality," but truly at one and the same time human and Divine.

2. Sometimes it is man's pitiful corruption or moral worthlessness which seems to discredit the Christian conception of His place in God's mind. It is easy for any casual critic to lay bare the dark and base things in humanity, and show how marred and miserable is man's life. But the casual critic usually sees no deeper than the surface of things. In company with such seers as Carlyle and Browning, we may take man's struggles and distresses as the necessary pains in

the process of moral evolution, as signs of man's greatness and proofs of further ascent. The range of capacity for both good and ill widens as the creature rises in the scale of being. The range of a free and moral being stretches from the one pole to the other, which we call heaven and hell. An ox has not even the capacity to be base and miserable: it can but browse and chew its cud and drag a wagon and beget its kind. Man's higher stage of being involves more mingled and complex experiences, which are the price he pays for his chance of the eternal or diviner life. "Man's unhappiness comes of his greatness," is Carlyle's well-known dictum. "It is because there is an Infinite in him which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite."

Man, moreover, is not finished. To estimate precisely what is the value of a thing, we must observe, not merely what it sprang from, but rather what it has the "promise and potency" of becoming.

Evolution unites with Christianity in declaring that, on his less animal side, man is not yet completed, that "the best is yet to be."

"The body sprang
At once to the height and stay'd: the soul—not!"

Evolution brings to man a gospel of hope and future progress. Not only is he the dominating creature on the common earth, but Nature seems to have selected him as the heir of the æons to come. "Grown his growth lasts." If physically he has a humble past and a mean origin, he has a front place in the ascending forces that make the future.

In the human struggle for existence the savage races on the whole tend to disappear before the enlightened.* Physical qualities play a less and less important part in the human advance. The powers

* See for contrary contention, the late C. H. Pearson's *National Character*. But his pessimistic outlook has not been approved by other students of the subject.

of the mind are proving themselves fittest to survive.

What is better: the moral is on the whole outliving the immoral forces in human life. Nations that are impure or luxurious or selfish tend to grow weak and die out. Vice and impiety corrupt and kill out their devotees in the course of a few generations. The nations that exhibit the most robust vitality are those in which justice, purity, and benevolence are the strongest and the Christian type of character the best approved.

The laws of human evolution are on the side of the Christ-type of man. In the "eternal process" in which "from state to state the spirit walks," it is the Spirit of Christ that is promising to inherit the earth, and make men

> "Move upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die."

Man is not yet finished. It is still the Sixth Day of Creation, so to say; we are in the heat and noonday of it. God is

still engaged in the process of making man, slowly shaping him towards the image of God. It is chiefly by Jesus Christ He is creating us in the Divine likeness. It is by the "Logos," by the Spirit of Christ, that sons are being born into the father's image. They are still incomplete: all things are not yet put under them; but the Type, *the* Son of Man, is seen, crowned with glory and honour. And when the creation of man has attained that Ideal, then the earth-creation ceases and God "rests."

Such is the vision to which we cling in faith and hope.

"There is no justice—all things are driven about by a blind chance."—Olive Schreiner.

XVI

The Woes of the World *v.* A Good God

The World's Anguish-cry — Olive Schreiner — Animal Sufferings—A Matter of Nerves—Projected Pains—Gravediggers—Many Miseries, Many Men—The Balance of Joy—A Blacksmith's Pains—Moral Use of Pain—Dr. Kane—The Reward of Virtue—Miseries and Mercy—Heroic Philanthropy—The Silent One—"God is Love."

It is not with Christ we have any quarrel: so speaks one of the Two Voices, the accuser, within us. It is with God we are offended—God the responsible Maker of a world so stricken with pitiless suffering and tragic woes. I declare—*salvâ reverentiâ*—I should not like to be God, and hear the cry of pain from the whole conscious creation, and know that I had called such a rueful world into existence *It would break my heart.*

The use to which God puts His sentient creatures is, in some measure, a test of His character. What, then, of the Being

who can remain mute while listening to the "stertorous hum" of the world's woe? He must hear this "passion-music" of humanity: how can He hear it and stand aloof? Surely (continues the Accusing Voice within) man—and even the brute—has his rights, and even God has His duties, as every father has his duties, to the beings He has brought into the world. Caliban grovels before Setebos, who "doth as he likes, or wherefore lord?" But a god who simply "doth as he likes" with his creatures' sensibilities cannot expect to be adored and loved unless what "he likes" be good.

It was this—"nature red in tooth and claw"—that made John Stuart Mill think that, if there was a god, he was either not omnipotent, or not altogether good. When Goethe was a boy of six, vivid reports reached him of the Lisbon earthquake and its dreadful scenes. His sensitive heart "seemed to be singed by the breath of the volcanic fire, and,

horror-struck by the pitiless destruction of lives and homes and art, his child-mind uttered a cry of doubt, Can such a god be merciful?" Darwin sometimes leaned to theism, at other times to agnosticism; and the weight that too often turned the scales against belief in a good God was the cruelty of creation.

Olive Schreiner, it is evident from her writings, has been driven from Christian belief mainly by the indignant sense of the world's unheeded woes. Immoral fates seem to play with sentient creatures, and in vain does she "yearn for a token from the inexorably Silent One." It was in her *Times and Seasons*—those Seven Ages of the Soul, which one hopes may be followed by an eighth and sunnier age—that she said (in her haste): "There is no justice. The ox dies in its yoke beneath its master's whip; it turns its anguish-filled eyes on the sunlight, but there is no sign of recompense to be made it. The black man is shot like a

dog, and it goes well with the shooter. The innocent are accused, and the accuser triumphs. If you will take the trouble to scratch the surface anywhere, you will see under the skin a sentient being writhing in impotent anguish."

Nor, search he ever so earnestly, can the Christian optimist find compensating facts such as will perfectly satisfy his sense of justice and goodness.

Obviously, it is vain to ascribe all the sufferings and groans of creation to sin. No doubt one sees in hospitals and asylums numerous cases of disease which are traceable to the immoralities, either of the sufferers themselves or of their "forbears." But "Job" stands forth as a dramatic type, intended to remind us that the best of men have been the greatest sufferers, while human demons have often strutted through life in health and good fortune.

Many of the Psalms, as well as Job and Ecclesiastes, reveal to us that this enigma

has distressed men's minds in all ages. It is the problem on which the Psalmists are perpetually harping. They call upon the Most High to come forth and establish His righteousness or fairness, and rectify the lot of the suffering good and the flourishing bad. But, unlike many modern pessimistic sceptics, they "keep ever to the sunnier side of doubt," and still hope in God.

1. What most offends some minds is that the lower animals should suffer. Fossil remains in the rocks prove, too, that long before man's appearance and "fall" animals suffered and died as they do now. Says Darwin: "We behold the face of nature bright with gladness; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing around us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus destroying life; we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings are destroyed by other birds or beasts of prey."

Of Gautama, Sir Edwin Arnold writes, in his *Light of Asia*,—

> "Then mark'd he, too,
> How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him;
> Each slew a slayer and in turn was slain,
> Life living upon death. So the fair shew
> Veiled one vast, savage, grim conspiracy
> Of mutal murder, from worm to man,
> Who himself kills his fellow."

Has the loftier of the Two Voices any adequate reply to make to such serious charges against creation? A reply, indeed; but, when all is said that truth and faith will allow, the burden of the doubt is not wholly lifted from the mind. Even then the mystery is not finished.

For one thing, we probably overstate the actual anguish of the lower creatures, imagining that they are bundles of sensitive nerves and quick brains like our own, and that they therefore have our sensibility to pain. A trodden worm writhes, and we credit it with all the pain that the foot of a Brobdingnag would inflict on a delicate child under his heel. But, happily,

the mere truth is, that in lower forms of life the pains, like the pleasures, are immeasurably less than they are in human beings. The swimmer can take no adequate revenge upon the jelly-fish for stinging him. Its security is its want of nerves!

It is the mind that is the measure of pain. Hence savages suffer less than the civilised, and the cruelties which, ten centuries ago, Englishmen inflicted on each other were more easily borne by men more hardy and less sensitive than we are to-day. The higher in the scale of being, the wider is the range of sensibility both to pain and pleasure. Our very sufferings are thus a measure of our greatness and our high rank in creation. Was ever suffering like unto Christ's suffering? The highest suffer most, as they also enjoy most. Why the higher condition should always carry with it greater possibilities, both for better and for worse, is itself a further mystery. (And what

are solutions but, like chemical analyses, steps back to remoter elements of mystery?) But, at any rate, it is fact that the lower suffer least. Even the sodden sufferers of the slums, one observes, have, in most cases, a merciful hardening of their sensibilities, which relatively takes off something of their woes, if not to us, at least to themselves. Much more, then, if birds and beasts have not our moral supports in bearing pain, they are released from the penalties of "nerves" from which we suffer. The ox may seem to Olive Schreiner to "turn its anguish-filled eyes on the sunlight as it dies," but at least a certain amount of the anguish is projected into the ox by the pity-filled heart of Olive Schreiner. There are proportionate compensations in every grade of nature.

Then, too, the death which strikes the spectator as so cruel is often mitigated by death's benumbing of sensibility. There is a merciful paralysis that deadens con-

sciousness. Wounds which soldiers receive in the heat of battle are often unfelt till the excitement is over. "Every schoolboy" has heard how, when the African lion fastened on Livingstone's arm and broke it, when it shook him vigorously and let him drop, and then stood over him watching him, the helpless hero never lost clear consciousness, and yet the shock took away all sense of fear or pain. He lay calmly speculating when and how it would begin to make its meal of him.

Nature is merciful in, as a rule, benumbing and deadening the victim's sensibilities when the apparent cruelties inflicted appal the sympathetic observer. Most of our worst pains are pains of anticipation, or of recollection and desolation. These the lower animals are mercifully spared, since their wars are the wars of surprise.

Moreover, to die by gunshot, or in the jaws of the stronger, is no worse than to die what we call a "natural death."

Granted that two blacks do not make a white, and the final mystery remains, "Why death and its pains?" But if it be the violence of the universal slaughter that offends us, as it offended Darwin, then we are bound to consider that a violent death is probably no worse to endure than the decay and death of old age. If we may judge from human feelings, the swift end is probably the preferable in the matter of suffering.

What would happen if all beasts, birds, and insects were to escape becoming a prey to other creatures? They would decay and lie unburied—poisoning the air and spreading disease. Nature has its economics, and protects itself against such perils. It makes the lower creatures—and man, too, to some extent—grave-diggers and scavengers; and, in the very act of providing them with food, it establishes a utilitarian system of sanitation.

2. It is when we come to mankind, and imagine to ourselves the world of human

suffering, that the crushing weight of the problem threatens to overwhelm one's faith. It is here that Olive Schreiner, and Mr. W. Hale White in his *Mark Rutherford* stories, lay bare life's relentless riddle of the heart's unspeakable doubts. But while they depict the perverse destinies and blind confusion of human existence, they, alas! do little to bring back lost lights and hopes.

It would be too daring for any mortal to undertake to "justify the ways of God to men." We are scarcely entitled to demand that the Eternal shall deliver up to our limited intelligence the keys of all His secret ways and infinite operations. What we may undertake is to discover whether there are not sufficient reasons for a tenacious confidence in the ultimate wisdom and goodness of Creation, whether we may

> "Trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill;
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood.

"That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete."

In such inscrutable mysteries we "can but trust that good shall fall at last—far off—at last to all." But there are glints of good that even now shoot through the dark problems of human woe.

We conceive the sufferings of humanity *en masse*, and feel them intolerable to our sympathy. I have no intention of depreciating these woes of mankind. But I venture to think we fall into a serious miscalculation here, and this miscalculation has made the problem more oppressive than it really is.

We take, it may be, the five millions of human beings in London; and we, in some degree, imagine their combined sufferings. But our mistake lies in conceiving this suffering *in bulk* as the burden which *our own single heart must carry.* The mass of suffering is distributed among

millions of hearts. If we mass the sufferings of the people, we ought concurrently to mass the numbers of the sufferers—their strength and courage and hope and sympathy. Relatively to the numbers among whom the sufferings are distributed, these sufferings are no greater, and no more intolerable, than the sufferings of one individual are to his strength and his ability to bear them. The problem of mankind's pain is proportionately no greater and no less than the problem of the individual's pain. Dr. Dallinger has cited the 21,988 inhabitants of India who, in one year, have died either by snake-bite or by carnivora, and his mind is appalled at "what this means in agony." But the total agony—which smites his mind in its total bulk—was distributed over 21,988 people; and the problem of the whole is at least no worse than the problem of the individual victim. The sufferings of each still stand unexplained; but it is a complete miscalculation of the case to

combine the sufferings of the whole, and set one imagination to confront them. We may be sure that only a Divine Being, a Divine capacity, could bear the total human woe on His heart.

Over against our haunting nightmare of the world's suffering, we should fill up imagination equally with the world's intelligence, sympathy, strength, hopefulness, endurance, faith. These do not abolish the weight of the woe, but they go into the scales to balance, more or less accurately, the moral problem.

Through the very intensity of our sympathy and imagination we are liable, in our present nerve-stricken generation, to realise mainly the pains, and overlook the pleasures of human life. Sir John Lubbock does a valuable service to his pessimistic contemporaries in emphasizing the "Pleasures of Life," and claiming that they exceed the pains of life.

Pain is, primarily, an electric message to the brain, warning the intelligence of

some disorder or danger to the body. It compels attention, and locates the mischief. Were it not for this sharp call shot along the nerve-wire to the guardian mind, disease might do its disintegrating work, and kill ere the victim knew. We remember the legend of the blacksmith who cursed the hot iron for burning him, and swore that he wished some power would make him proof against the pain of heat. In answer to his wish an evil spirit took away all sense of feeling; he seized the hot metal without a twinge of pain, but soon saw, to his dismay, that the flesh had been burnt to the bone! Thus it is pain that saves from death.

Then, pain has the magic power of pricking the moral nature into sensibility. Not because pain is the *pœna* or *pœnalty* of the sufferer's sin; but the human spirit is haunted by the evil omens of guiltiness, and by a forboding instinct connects sharp sufferings with past misdoings. Strike the ground, goes the old saying, and the

guilty man is startled. By some such law of suggestion pain rises as the silent finger of God, pointing us to that which our inward court of justice forbodes. It often comes, like *a sudden look in the face*, to wake the slumbering moral sense.

No small amount of human suffering is the indirect and transmitted result of human sin—of intemperance, of tyrannous over-driving, of vicious excess. These pass on "taints of blood" to succeeding generations. Why the innocent and the guilty should thus suffer together is again a further mystery. But there is even some little satisfaction to the mind in the discovery that so much of human suffering had, even indirectly, a moral and personal origin.

Pains may thus, in some measure, be God's "silent thunderbolts," shooting in the sense of merited suffering. It would be hard for us to realise the *pœna* that sin deserves; but, lo! here in our flesh is the

physical symbol of it. Like the rainbow which was not *created* as a memento of the Flood, but was set apart to act as the witness and symbol of God's pledge, pains, while not sent each pang for a sin, become charged with the *pœnal* associations and symbolic suggestions which experience has given them. They act as echoes in the flesh of still deeper disorders and their invisible penalties.

Besides, they "move us on," prevent us from settling down too fixedly in this human abode, as if we are always to be here. If life were painless, should we not lose one more stimulus to the struggle for a higher state of existence? Should we not lose a little of our sense of dependence on God? Our pains are like our daily wants—invisible cords to draw our thoughts back home to the Source of all.

If these were abolished, death, when it came, would find us too deeply rooted in our human ground to be fit for transplanting. Sufferings make us *sit lightly* here

—camp or "tabernacle," and not "build a city which hath foundations." They are heralds sent before to prepare the way for the Angel of Death, and wake us from the low dream of earth.

It is an old story, but a serviceable illustration of one gain of suffering, how Dr. Kane went to the Arctic regions in search of Sir John Franklin. The crew were lost for four days among the icebergs at 70° below freezing. Kane tells us how dreamy slumbers stole over them, and they imagined themselves beside warm fires in their own cosy homes. When their leader roused them, they protested, "We are not cold; all we want is a little sleep." But he knew what a single hour's sleep would end in. He shook them, beat them, bruised them, used every cruel means of keeping them awake till the brig was reached. The poor fellows were delirious with pain as they stumbled aboard the icy ship. But they were saved! It would seem that sufferings are the sharp pricks

that save from moral slumber and death. Why we should have been so constructed as to require such treatment in order to keep the spirit alive is itself the deep enigma: there the Sphinx sits for ever silent. All we can do is to show that, as things *are* constituted, pain serves certain profitable ends.

Best of all—if only it were *always* true!—pain is one process in the evolution of the virtues and the graces. We love the soft delicious heat of summer; but it is winter that braces us and "kills our cankerworms." The sufferings which fall on Job, and those of whom he is the type, are not altogether the calamities they appear. "The innocent are accused," says Olive Schreiner, "and the accuser triumphs." But the triumph of the accuser is no blessing to him, for in his wicked success he suffers loss in his inward character, while perhaps the innocent victim may be morally the winner. At any rate, He who was done to death on Golgotha

was less to be pitied in His apparent defeat than His accusers in their triumph. The Eternal Justice recompenses conduct "after its kind," as everything in creation brings forth "after its kind." God does not reward virtue with sweets, nor vice with bitters; innocence with earthly triumph, nor cruelty with fever. The recompense, working out the justice of things, for moral or immoral action, comes in the moral harvest that is reaped in personal character and its issues.

It is written in the lives of famous men, and might be found true in the lives of the common poor, that the best qualities of mind and character—courage, sympathy, self-mastery—have been forged on the hard anvil of distress. It is written in larger hand in the history and comparative condition of the races of the earth, that where the tropical sun and the soil have made life easy, human character has been far inferior to that produced under the cold and painful conditions of northern

climes. Hard necessities bring "a gain to match" in races as in individuals.*

Darwin said to a friend, "If I had not been so great an invalid I should not have done nearly so much work." Carlyle, too: "We will not complain of Dante's miseries [how the great man complained of his own!]; had all gone well with him as he wished it, Florence would have had another prosperous Lord Mayor, but the world would have lost the *Divina Commedia*." Paul regards the very groans of creation as birth-throes of a higher nature. Nor is this the mere pietism of preachers. The

* "The whole mystery of pain," says Robertson, of Brighton, victim of keen mental agony, "has been unravelling itself to my heart gradually, and now that I have got a clue, the worse than Cretan labyrinth turns out to be a harmonious and beautiful arrangement, so that the paths which are still unexplored I can now believe are part of the same plan . . Goodness is better than happiness; and if pain be the minister of goodness, I can see that it is a proof of love to debar happiness. . . . I know that the heart, like the wound, must bleed till the wound has cleansed itself by it own blood, &c.—*Life*, Letter lix.; *cf.* also Hinton's *Mystery of Pain*

greatest poet-seers have perceived the same slow law of final justice,—as Browning:—

> "I can believe this dread machinery
> Of sin and sorrow (would confound me else),
> Devised to evolve
> By new machinery in counterpart,
> The moral qualities in man—how else?—
> To make him love and be beloved,
> Creative and self-sacrificing, too,
> And thus eventually God-like."

3. It is not mere pain that is my sorest and most baffling problem. Nor is it poverty and struggle: for I venture to believe that, if we could perfectly balance the mingled pleasures and pains of high and low, we should find that there is about the same *average* in most ranks of men. Even the gutter children have happiness unknown to the darlings of a duchess. But what remains inexplicable is the doom which drives so many into coarse evils—the providence, or evil fate, which "damns" thousands into the world under conditions which are sure to make them

sodden and debased. It is in the sunken parts of large cities that one's heart is appalled at this problem of moral confusion and perverse destinies. We can only believe that the Fair Judge of all reckons not men by the absolute bulk of what their life amounts to, but by the possibilities of each in his environment. We can only have faith in infinite goodness, and perfect insight, such as the Friend of Sinners exhibited. Here the mystery is deepest. One can but hope in the Infinite Love.

One gleam of light meets us in the fact that the brotherhood of calamity is evoking the sisterhood of mercy. The sufferings and sorrows of the unfortunate are, more now than ever before, developing a mighty ministry of sympathy. The very anguish of sensitive hearts over the woes of the world is the product of a growing sense of human kinship. The deepening consciousness of London's miseries is a sign and measure of the expansion of the humanitarian heart of society. It is a

witness to the operation of Christ's sympathetic sense of humanity to-day. It is the garment of His Spirit that feels the touch of suffering and despair. The growth of this sense of human distress is the promise and instalment of help and better social relations yet to come.

Some men look longingly on the old Pagan days, when the weak and aged and unfit were left to perish. They secretly think it would be better for the race if the diseased were still killed off by the struggle for life. Yes, as animals the race might be improved; but as human beings the race would be debased in its very improvement. All the tenderer sympathies would be sapped at the root. The spirit of self-denial would be soured into a spirit of hard self-interest. The richest qualities of the human heart are developed by those distresses which throw the unfortunate and wounded upon the hearts and hands of their fellows.

Philanthropy creates a new riddle by

preserving the weak-chested and tainted, and by enabling them to survive and propagate themselves and their evil heredity. Were natural law allowed to work its will, it would speedily kill them off. It might seem as if philanthropy were adding to the social problem which it seeks to relieve. But even already we can dimly see that nature has, as she always has had in her vast upward course, resources ready to meet this new difficulty. Not only do the tainted and unfit tend to die off in the fourth and fifth generation, as has been amply proved; not only do the unfit diseased thus tend ultimately to fall out of the progressive march of the healthy fit; but the growing social sense of brotherhood has in it the promise and potency of alleviating the conditions which have in the past bred disease.

That very social distress which blackens large sections of civilisation is calling into existence a new type of heroic humanity, a social patriotism, which is one of the most

hopeful characteristics of modern life. Besides, it is ineffably preferable to cut off one's right hand in the service of the unfit than, by leaving them to be destroyed, to lose one's own soul of humanity and goodness.

4. What wounds our faith is the settled dumbness of the Over-Heart. The sky is brazen — or rather, seems appallingly empty in its blue depths. To all the cries of human distress "He answers never a word." If He sees what the stars at midnight see, and what the sun sees in his daily procession; if He hears all that goes on under "that smoke counterpane," why, as Carlyle said, does He "do nothing"?

"He keeps absent—why I cannot think." But do we expect Him to leap out of the blue into our midst with rescue that would reverse all the conditions of human life? What response is it we should expect? If we have deep insight by faith, we may perceive that He is not an Absentee—is

not standing aloof from our life, and that He enters our midst to alleviate life's worst woes in a way much more helpful to our higher nature than any sudden material cures dropped down to us would be.

The entrance of the Divine sympathy and rescue into human life is the welcome discovery which we make in Christ and Christianity. The spirit of Jesus that is abroad to-day is doing mightier works than were done in Palestine; is brooding on social chaos, and working to produce cosmos; is conveying to men a healing ministry and redemptive power; is generating social blessings which are worth more to sufferers than any amount of miraculous feats would be.

Mr. Benjamin Kidd says: "This altruistic development, and the deepening and softening of character which has accompanied it, are the direct and peculiar product of the religious system on which our civilisation is founded." * The spirit

* *Social Evolution*, p. 160.

of sympathy and the sense of humanity which Jesus has developed in human hearts are the Divine answer to human needs. It is not the less a Divine response because it is moral, spiritual, inaudible. Its fruits, at any rate, are before our eyes and in our lives. Even the dumb animals are sharing somewhat in this sense of brotherhood. Jesus is God's utterance, or "Word," in answer to man's urgent cry of need.

Our natural desire is to secure release from life's severities. The stern benevolence of God, however, is resolutely intent upon building up our character to the fulness of the stature of *man*, that is, Jesus Christ.

In Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago*, when a deadly epidemic—"a banquet of Beelzebub"—sweeps the town, the hero and heroine reassure their faith by the thought that the God who permits such distress (if good at all) must be a *very good* God; that the purpose must be

stupendous in its range of kindness which can employ such calamities as its means of working.

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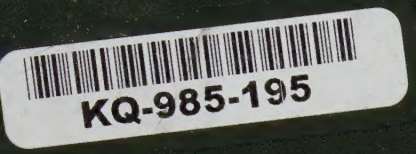
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